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# **JACK RICHARDSON'S THEORY OF HISTORICAL EVOLUTION IN "THE PRODIGAL"**

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1979

*There is but one way for the modern to  
become great, and perhaps unequalled;  
I mean, by imitating the ancients.*

Winckelmann

ACT I / SCENE 1

EGISTHUS I am inquiring into your real nature, Prince. Things will soon be happening in Argos that will make it necessary for me to know the secret dreams of all its citizens.

RESTES Mine are quite harmless, I assure you.

EGISTHUS And yet you stand aside and mock all I do. Why?

RESTES Really, Aegisthus, you should know better. I have nothing against collective misery being turned to someone's advantage, but I don't ask me to be enthusiastic about it.

EGISTHUS You think you stand above the world?

RESTES Above, below, or to the side, yes. I am comfortable when included in world schemes.

EGISTHUS You wish your freedom to be used?

RESTES I wish my freedom to be irrelevant, and I wish you to be irrelevant.

EGISTHUS The only one of your kind? There are many.

RESTES If you mean the only one who is better than the others, yes. But after all I am Young, Aegisthus, and I should have the right.

ACT I / SCENE 2

LYTEMNESTRA What was that? Was I too eager to see you? Was I too eager to see you? Was I too eager to see you? Was I too eager to see you?

LYTEMNESTRA He loves you and is devoted to you. He loves you and is devoted to you. He loves you and is devoted to you.

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PROFESSOR ORIENTADOR

Doutor Heriberto Arns

Titular de Literatura Norte-Americana  
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## ABSTRACT

Greek dramatists based their plays on historical and mythological facts which received a tragic interpretation. Within this framework, Jack Richardson, who has a deep knowledge of Greek tragedy, also tries to insert some political and historical events which affect Modern Civilization within the framework of the Orestes myth. In his play The Prodigal, which is being analysed in this dissertation, the author focuses on the Trojan War and, as happens in all wars, the returning soldiers, like the citizens of Argos, are affected by the psychological postwar consequences of exhaustion and fatigue.

In the above mentioned play, the political dimension is fundamental and it constitutes a kind of *leitmotiv* which supports the dramatic action. The author demonstrates a special interest in the political function of man - the political structure determines the social and religious aspects in this play. In a literary text, the political aspect does not



have any special value on its own, but it can signify an essential element of its structure.

Richardson dramatizes his theory of Historical Evolution in The Prodigal. The author focuses on the reasons and circumstances which cause the decay of an Institution which cannot maintain its fundamental values against a new mentality which emerges. He analyses political divergences, the sociology of the family and brings forward some religious, literary and philosophical arguments, taking as models the characters of ancient mythology.

The main purpose of this dissertation is to determine Richardson's theory of Historical Evolution in The Prodigal. My intention is to compare the modern play with Aeschylus's Oresteia in order to determine how far the two playwrights hold the same views and which are the novelties introduced by Jack Richardson.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Modern American Drama at the outset of the 1960's is represented by Edward Albee, Jack Richardson, Arthur Kopit and Jack Gelber. These four authors were simultaneously active in the Playwrights' Unit of the Actors Studio in New York in the season of 1962-63. This young generation of playwrights has been deeply influenced by the French Theatre of the early fifties.

Jack Richardson<sup>1</sup>, whose first play The Prodigal is the subject - matter of this dissertation, is considered the most intellectual of the young playwrights<sup>2</sup>. He has written six plays, The Prodigal (1960); Gallows Humor (1961); Lorenzo (1963); Xmas in Las Vegas (1966); As Happy as Kings (1968); Juan Feldman, in Pardon Me, Sir, But is My Eye Hurting Your Elbow? (1968) and a novel, The Prison Life of Harris Filmore (1961)<sup>3</sup>.

The Prodigal, which is a reworking of the Orestes legend, is regarded by the critics as the best of Richardson's plays<sup>4</sup>. It received both the Vernon Rice and the Obie awards. Gallows Humor is in fact two

short plays joined by a common theme<sup>5</sup>. This first pair of plays was produced off Broadway, while Lorenzo was Richardson's first play on Broadway. ...Lorenzo is a Renaissance variation of The Prodigal, but with a special emphasis upon illusion and reality...<sup>6</sup>. Another Broadway play is Xmas in Las Vegas which, ...with its insistence upon the either/or of winner and loser, repeats the executioner-condemned contraries of Gallows Humor...<sup>7</sup>.

The Prodigal, a modern version of the Orestes legend, reveals the author's familiarity not only with Greek drama but also with contemporary philosophy. It is not the first time that a modern play has been inspired by a Classical theme. In fact, the remote Orestes myth has been dramatized by various authors from Antiquity to Modern times. Aeschylus' Oresteia, Euripides' Iphigenia in Tauris and Goethe's Iphigenie auf Tauris are thematic reformulations of the ancient legends. In modern times the Oresteian Trilogy has rightly been accorded a place among the greatest achievements of the human mind...<sup>8</sup>. In fact, the use of ancient Greek dramatic legends has been fairly common in the modern theatre, as in Sartre's The Flies, Giraudoux's Trojan War Will not Take Place, E. O'Neill's Mourning Becomes Electra, T.S.Eliot's The Family Reunion, Cocteau's Infernal Machine and Anouilh's Antigone.

ne<sup>9</sup>.

When Jack Richardson wrote The Prodigal using the Orestes legend and other mythological elements as a framework for his play, he undoubtedly had in mind a modern situation which has been repeated throughout history.<sup>10</sup> The Hellenic civilization and our contemporary civilization - two worlds far removed from one another in time - are linked in this play by a universal theme. The disturbing periods of war and peace are themes which always concern men both in the political life of nations and in the arts, especially in literature. Peace and war, stability and instability, action and reaction in crucial historical moments obey the natural impulses of the dynamics of history or of historical evolution. The few historical events of ancient Greece give us sufficient material to verify that the dilemma which is so real nowadays - the choice between the strong, centralizing, authoritarian system on the one hand and the liberal and democratic system on the other, was also present in the political life of that civilization.

The development of the action in The Prodigal is essentially linked to the war of Troy which constitutes the historical, temporal and spatial setting of the Orestes legend and consequently of Richardson's play.

In fact, a war causes fundamental changes in the political structures of a society. Thucydides gives us his testimony that the communities of his time were also affected by the psychological postwar phenomenon of exhaustion and fatigue which bring about political changes. Richardson, who served in the U.S. Army in Frankfurt and Paris<sup>11</sup>, is, like Thucydides, a direct witness of the effects of war on people - the postwar frustration generates essential alterations in the political-religious and social structures of a nation: *...Agamemnon's returning soldiers have spent their idealism and their craving for heroic deeds on the battlefield and now dream of the quiet pleasures of home and conjugal life...*<sup>12</sup>.

In The Prodigal:

First Soldier:

*...We know you can never rest for long. Soon you'd be calling on us again to set off after you and telling us we're being men when we threw ourselves into another fight. No, Agamemnon, we're tired of that life.*

Second Soldier:

*We're tired of being strangers to our own homes, of having to struggle to recognise our children. I've spent twenty good years in your army, and all I'm left with now is fear that it's meant nothing.*<sup>13</sup>

In Thucydides:

*Even after the Trojan war, Hellas was still engaged in removing and settling, and thus*

*could not attain to the quiet which must precede growth. The late return of the Hellenes from Ilium caused many revolutions, and factions ensued almost everywhere; and it was the citizens thus driven into exile who founded the cities...*<sup>14</sup>.

In Toynbee:

*...Thucydides' world and my world had now proved to be philosophically contemporary. And, if this were the true relation between the Graeco - Roman and the Western civilizations, might not the relation between all the civilizations known to us turn out to be the same?*<sup>15</sup>

If Richardson based the form of his play on the Greek source, this was intentional in order to reveal nodal and nuclear elements which are able to create a true world of poetic conjectures, or by contrast, an antipolar poetic world which is also able to project creative recourses and amazing dramatic effects. Beyond the ethical and rational equilibrium which is an essential and noteworthy trait of the Greek people the Greek substratum represents a secure hierarchy of existential values which undergoes in The Prodigal a new dilectic vision. Richardson is inspired by a classical myth - he starts from the Oresteia theme but he *...does not dwell on the traditional scenes (...); he chooses to introduce new scenes and new motivations...*<sup>16</sup>. In this play the author focuses on certain elements of the ancient myth in a way which clearly reflects his opinion of important political-psychologi-

cal and social conflicts which shape our modern civilization.

Richardson uses the characters of the ancient legend in The Prodigal. The characters, Orestes, Electra, Agamemnon, Clytemnestra and Aegisthus, among others, are not mere characters, but structural ideas or states of mind. The mythological characters possess a historical, monolithic reality, being acclaimed and recognized as a part of the world's cultural heritage. When Richardson reworks such ideas he makes use of certain classical elements which help the experienced spectator relate the modern play with the ancient myth.

In The Prodigal, Richardson ...dramatizes his theory of historical evolution. Agamemnon (...) is the representative of the old order, of a conquering phase of mankind, of the expanding stage in a ruler's career...<sup>17</sup>. On the other hand, Aegisthus' stage is the direct opposite of Agamemnon's. ...He represents a new order; (...) he incarnates (...) the organizational stage of a ruler...<sup>18</sup>. A society inevitably oscillates between these two extremes but does not reach a position of equilibrium: both systems cannot coexist.

Richardson's Orestes, at the beginning of the play, is undesirous of any involvement and avoids taking part in the destructive oppositions Agamemnon

and Aegisthus represent. But the murder of his father compels him to take part in the battle of extremes he has sought to avoid. At the end, Orestes assumes his rightful place on the Argive throne, becomes involved in the affairs of the world, and events follow naturally the course of historical evolution.

Historical evolution is determined by a continuous, dynamic process which impels a society to reformulate its political, religious, philosophical and social values. Every society demands a change in its political order from time to time. The transition from one phase to another is dictated by the majority and articulated by a leader aware of what he is doing. The renewal phase is a result of an inarticulate, collective exhaustion which is the reflection of a natural historical movement of stability and instability. One political system survives for a period of time until the people demand an innovation. But, when a ruler has a despotic or tyrannical way of carrying on governmental affairs, he will generate the collective chaos and rebellion of that society. A ruler who cares for the favorable development of a society leaves history to follow its natural course, although it sometimes demands a change in its structure. This historical process which characterizes human communities is illustrated in The Prodigal by Jack Richardson's theory of



historical evolution.

In The Prodigal, when the author makes use of Greek elements, he produces a poetic recreation. This present study will also try to determine to what extent Jack Richardson and Aeschylus in his Oresteia share the same views and what specifically separates them. In other words, the modern author was inspired by the Classical myth, but what are the novelties introduced by him? How does he illustrate his theory of historical evolution? Which are the complementary aspects? Does the author criticize imperialism and capitalism in the American system? Does he want to emphasize the effect of decisive, external forces on men showing that there is no balance between an imposed order and our personal freedom? Does this mean that collective purpose always prevails over individual lives? Does Richardson suggest man's enforced subservience to the demands of society? Does the author want to bring forward a systematic image of human history showing that different civilizations go through similar phases of growth, decay and eventual dissolution? Does an understanding of The Prodigal imply previous knowledge of the Classical myth by the readers or spectators?

Generalizations are always inadequate. The comparison of literature imposes distinctions. Greek Lit-

erature, above the rest of world literature, above the habitual argumentation and the aspects discussed by Ulrich Weisstein in Comparative Literature and Literary Theory, deserves a special place for historical-cultural reasons. The Greek literary culture, far from being a parallel literature, is a basilar literature, an isolated case in the world. According to William Nestle, Greece is the source of all scientific knowledge and of all formal beauty.<sup>19</sup>

This dissertation puts forward a new proposal in comparative methodology: Greek Literature is not just a case of Comparative Literature but it is basic literature which influences the generation of new ideas. Historically, certain themes, motifs and cosmovisions of ages enlightened by great thinkers, incite in authors, individually, or in groups of thinkers and artists of later ages the cultural transposition of aesthetic, ethic and philosophical values which were evident in those ages.

Greek Literature, above all, surpasses the general, worldwide literary phenomena. It is a primordial literature and it is not only an opposition of a literature A and B, but a reserve from ancient times which is inserted into Western literature and inspires the creation of new values.

Greek culture is a continuous, inalienable,

historical substratum which is not merely transplanted but is recreated in masterpieces of all ages. Intellectuals in general and particularly poets always read, re-read and analyse the plays written by the Greek geniuses, absorbing their essence and reproducing in their own plays the original vigour.

Richardson in The Prodigal, to imply the continual struggle of the old order against the new, properly starts from the tradition which is firmly established, from the absolute principles, from the unchangeable values, from the traditions which are historically developed, from the orthodox man which is recognized among the Greeks. Starting from the classical material Richardson introduces the contrast of the modern context, of the new values, of the present-day political problems of our civilization. Modern youth is indifferent and denies the old values: *...Orestes is an entirely contemporary figure - an outsider who wants nothing so much as to dissociate himself from a society which seems to him insane, but he is unable to resist the organized and powerful forces of that society...<sup>20</sup>.*

The theme which will be developed in this study is quite original - it is not the subject of any available book or academic paper. There are only some commentaries and articles in specialized magazines about

the author's life and plays. Gilbert Debusscher is the author who has written an interesting and significant study of Richardson's The Prodigal and Sartre's The Flies.

The present dissertation is limited to the following objectives:

1. to determine Richardson's theory of historical evolution in terms of the theories of some well known philosophers and historians.
2. to demonstrate, citing historical events, that the same life cycle of growth and decay is present in the development of all civilizations.
3. to compare the ancient and modern plays to determine the novelties introduced by Jack Richardson.
4. to verify that Richardson makes some allusions to modern American policy when he makes references to the war and its effects on civilians, soldiers and family life.
5. to confirm the author's view about the philosophy of determinism in which man is impelled by political, social and emotional forces.

This study of Richardson's The Prodigal is composed of six chapters. The Introduction offers the essential biographical elements and commentaries about the author's life and works. It also includes the general lines which will guide the analysis of the play including comments about the author's theory of historical evolution, the reasons for a comparative study with Aeschylus' Oresteia, the hypothesis, objectives and the comparative methodology which will be applied in this research.

In the second chapter, The Prodigal will be located within the Greek cosmovision according to the elements which are preserved and/or modified by the author in the modern play. The plot, the theme and the temporal and spatial structures of The Prodigal will be developed and analysed with some important references to Aeschylus' Oresteia.

The third chapter will consist of general commentaries about the characters of the play but with a special analysis of Agamemnon, Aegisthus and Orestes, the representatives of the political orders in historical evolution. Electra, who represents the voice of the majority and Cassandra who has the power to foresee future events, also represent important points of reference.

In the fourth chapter, the most important events

of Greek ancient history as narrated by Thucydides will be described and systematically commented on. Later, the Theories of the State put forth by Machiavelli, Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau, which were discussed by the leaders of the American Revolution, and which gave substance to the formulation of the two antagonistic ideological positions in a critical moment in Western Civilization will be outlined. And finally, Toynbee's systematic account of human history will be presented. These historical and philosophical references will be emphasized only when they are relevant to the development of the theme of this study.

In the fifth and most important chapter, Richardson's own view of Historical Evolution regarding his play The Prodigal will be analysed. In this historical - political context the collocation of Agamemnon's and Aegisthus' order and of Orestes' political position is essential for the understanding of the natural process of the dynamics of history.

In conclusion, besides establishing the most important relations between the various elements presented in the development of the theme, the hypothesis and objectives mentioned before will be validated.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The biographical references are essential in this study because Jack Richardson is not a well-known author. There is very little information available concerning the author's life and plays in either articles or books. For this reason, every comment and piece of information becomes necessary and valuable. Jack Richardson is a native New Yorker and was born in 1935. He is the son of Arthur and Marjorie Richardson. His father was a professional pianist. His mother died when he was young, and after his father remarried, Richardson lived with his grandmother. He graduated from Collegiate School, a New York preparatory school, in 1951. That summer he did a little summer stock acting at the Grist Mill Playhouse in Andover, New Jersey, and then studied acting for a few months at the American Theatre Wing in New York City. In 1952, at the age of seventeen, he enlisted in the U.S. Army for two years during the Korean War, serving in Frankfurt and Paris. In 1954, Richardson returned to the United States and entered Columbia University, graduating *Summa cum laude* with a B.A. in philosophy in 1957. Then, he won the Adenauer Fellowship for Germanic Studies. At the University of Munich, Richardson studied German philosophy and attended some lectures in German on American philosophers, mainly about Willian James and John Dewey.

It was at the University of Munich that he met and married, in 1957, Anne Gail Roth, the daughter of a New York Corporation lawyer. BRADISH, Gaynor F. Richardson, Jack. In: VINSON, James, ed. Contemporary Dramatists. London, St. James Press, 1973. p.647-9; WAKEMAN, John, ed. World Authors 1950-1970: a companion volume to Twentieth Century Authors. New York, Wilson, 1975, p.1209-10.

<sup>2</sup> *George E. Wellwarth (...) considered Richardson American's best young playwright, with a better mind and greater integrity than Edward Albee ...Time acclaimed the season's best new playwright...* WAKEMAN, p.1209.

<sup>3</sup> *Richardson has written about the theatre in such periodicals as Show and Theatre Arts, and he has contributed work to Botteghe Oscure, New World Writing, Transatlantic Review, and Esquire...* WAKEMAN, p.1210.

<sup>4</sup> *Walter Kerr called The Prodigal a permanent contribution to the contemporary theatre; George E. Wellwarth thinks it not merely a solid, well-written play, as sophisticated in content as it is precisely constructed in form: it is undoubtedly the most brilliantly written new American play to come out since the end of World War II. Gerald Weales disagreed, finding Richardson's argument interesting but his execution inadequate, especially in its characterization...* WAKEMAN, p.1209.

<sup>5</sup> *In Gallows Humor the two component plays are linked (...) by the fact that each play exactly reverses the central characters, condemned and executioner ...*



BRADISH, p.649. ...In the first play a condemned man, comfortably adjusted to death, tries but fails to resist the favors of a state-supplied whore; in the second his executioner, desperately bored with his way of life, tries but fails to escape from it: there is, these days, not much to choose between life and death ... WAKEMAN, p.1209.

<sup>6</sup> ...Lorenzo, director of the theatrical troupe *Theatre of the First Dove*, is caught up in the midst of a small war of the Renaissance in Italy, and like Orestes he tries vainly not to become involved in the destructive conflict of opposites, polarized here in the impractical Duke, Filippo, and his general, the realist Van Miessen... BRADISH, p.649.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> AECHYLUS. Oresteian Trilogy. Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1976. p.9. All references and quotations from this book are taken from this edition, hereafter cited in the text in parentheses as OT, followed by page numbers.

<sup>9</sup> Richardson faced a great problem in basing The Prodigal on the Orestes legend. He ...writes in the tradition of the established French playwrights from Racine to Anouilh. Almost every serious French writer turns to Greek drama for source material. French audiences are familiar with classical legends, which are deeply ingrained in their culture. For American Audiences, such a play must stand on its own merits, and the meaningful association with the past is lost. LEWIS, Allan. New-play madness and some new voices. In: \_\_\_\_.

American Plays and Playwrights of the Contemporary Theatre. New York, Grown, 1970. p.197. According to the critics, Richardson is influenced by Shaw and resembles Dürrenmatt and Frish. Most of the critics agree in affirming that the author has not surpassed the French and German tradition to create his work according to his own tendencies. WAKEMAN, p.1210.

<sup>10</sup> Thucydides expresses many times the idea that the destiny of men is repeated, because the Nature of Man is always the same. The axiom of Thucydides does not imply the birth of a historical conscience in the unilateral modern concept. Instead of being related only to the individual happening and to the strange and different, his history aspires to the knowledge of universal and stable laws. JAEGER, Werner. Paideia: a formação do homem grego. São Paulo, Herder, 1936. p.414-5.

<sup>11</sup> In Frankfurt and Paris he spent his time in public relations, ...*writing biographical news releases about United States officers stationed in Europe. In his spare time he studied fine arts and philosophy at the University of Paris.* WAKEMAN, p.1209.

<sup>12</sup> DEBUSSCHER, Gilbert. Modern Masks of Orestes: *The Flies* and *The Prodigal*. Modern Drama. 12:314, Dec. 1969.

<sup>13</sup> RICHARDSON, Jack. The Prodigal. New York, Dutton, 1960. p.51. All references and quotations from this play are taken from this edition, hereafter cited in the text in parentheses as P, followed by page numbers.

<sup>14</sup> THUCYDIDES. The History of the Peloponnesian War.

In: HUTCHINS, R.M., ed. Great Books of the Western World. Chicago, Enc.Britannica, 1952. v.6. p.352.

<sup>15</sup> GARDINER, Patrick. Theories of History. New York, Free Press, 1969. p.206.

<sup>16</sup> DEBUSSCHER, p.311.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p.313.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> NESTLE, William. Historia de la Literatura Griega. Barcelona, Labor, 1944. p.9.

<sup>20</sup> WAKEMAN, p.1209.

## 2. GREEK COSMOVISION IN THE PRODICAL

When Jack Richardson based his first play on the Orestes theme he made a very fortunate choice among many possible alternatives - creating a modern *prodigal* within the ancient mythological framework. Obviously, the adoption of a Greek legend is, as Zur Bonsen affirms, only an external *Form of Antiquity*<sup>1</sup>, the author being completely free to insert the modern version of the myth in a new historical cultural context.

Jack Richardson adopts the Orestes myth to illustrate his theory of historical evolution. In such a case, a knowledge of mythological events and beliefs which form the background of the myth and of Greek society is necessary for a more complete understanding of the ancient context and consequently of Richardson's point of view in his modern play.

### 2.1. THE BACKGROUND OF THE MYTH

The Orestes legend is a story which gradually

took form during several centuries; it is a story compounded of fact and imagination, myth and history, which reflects the beliefs, philosophy and ethical values of Hellenic society.

One of the most powerful Greek cities in the second millennium B.C. was Argos, in the Peloponnese. Two brothers, Atreus and Thyestes, descendants of Tantalus through Pelops, had quarrelled over the succession to the throne of Argos. Atreus decided to cause Thyestes' ruin by inducing him to commit a sacrilegious crime which would turn the Argive citizens against him. So it was. Atreus, in secret, murdered two of Thyestes' sons and served their flesh to him at a banquet. Thyestes was sent into exile but he took his third son Aegisthus with him. Thyestes died and Aegisthus was brought up in exile.

Later on, Agamemnon who was Atreus' eldest son inherited the Argive throne and with it the curse which had settled on his family. His brother Menelaus, on the other hand, succeeded his father-in-law Tyndareos on the throne of Sparta. Tyndareos' wife, Leda, had been loved by Zeus and bore twin daughters, Helen and Clytemnestra. Helen's uncommon beauty attracted innumerable suitors and they entered into a mutual pact: each man swore that he would accept Helen's choice as final and would offer his armed service to

her husband if his possession of her was threatened. It remains a historical mystery why Helen chose Menelaus as her husband. It was Agamemnon's inevitable fate to marry Helen's sister, Clytemnestra.

King Priam of Troy sent his son Paris as ambassador to Sparta and there, the prince was entertained by Helen. Aphrodite took the chance of bringing into effect her promise<sup>2</sup> and helped Paris to kidnap Helen. Menelaus pursued Helen to Troy. There was an almost universal response to his appeal, and Agamemnon was made commander-in-chief of a vast army and fleet. But when they were about to begin their expedition the wind changed to the north and they were not able to set off. The usual fair wind sacrifices had no effect. After several months of waiting, the prophet Calchas proclaimed that the anger of the goddess Artemis must be placated by the sacrifice of Agamemnon's virgin daughter Iphigenia. Agamemnon protested at first but finally he agreed to write to his daughter pretending that he had arranged her marriage with Achilles and ordering her to come to Aulis. After Iphigenia was sacrificed, the wind changed and the expedition left for Troy. In the ninth year of fighting, Paris was killed in battle. In the tenth, Troy was captured by the ruse of the wooden horse; all adult males were killed, the women and children enslaved, and the city

reduced to ashes.

The Classical Greek Universe is an inexhaustible poetic source. Various modern authors rework Greek culture, as it was mentioned, into a new poetic form which draws upon the primitive vigour to produce results of an amazing poetic splendour. This is the case with Richardson's The Prodigal.

## 2.2. THEMATIC STRUCTURE OF THE PRODIGAL

This present chapter describes the thematic structure of The Prodigal, with some added commentaries about the characters and their ideological positions. But, in this initial evaluation, the relations between all these elements will not be established. The retelling of the events which form the action of The Prodigal provides the reader with sufficient background to understand the general political, psychological and social circumstances of the play. Some references to the ancient Oresteia tragedy will be included when they are relevant.

The Classical Tragedy Oresteia is a sequence of three plays which share an absolute and indispensable dependence on an internal continuity. The ancient trilogy is composed of Agamemnon, The Choephoroi and The

Eumenides. However, the modern author breaks away from the classical structure and divides The Prodigal into two acts, each act having two scenes.

The first scene of both The Prodigal and Oresteia, begins at the moment when the fall of Troy has been announced and Agamemnon is about to return to Argos. The dramatic intensity of this moment, in Richardson's play, is increased by the description of Electra's dream about the return of her father's fleet. Electra has dreamt that Agamemnon and his soldiers would enter through the main harbor of Argos. Orestes foresees a less glorious return through the fishing harbor.

Orestes:

*Oh, my little sister, how poorly you know our father! From his legend I can safely deduce that he will enter the one where the fishing boats are anchored... (P 9-10)*

Clytemnestra speaks to Aegisthus about her fears. She feels Agamemnon's presence in the most insignificant things. *It's as if he were making dramatic preparations for his return by setting a well-planned scene in my memory... (P 26).*

In Aeschylus' and Richardson's plays, when Agamemnon left for Troy he left Aegisthus as his regent; the latter became Clytemnestra's lover. Aegisthus, in the modern play, has established a state religion de-



voted to *superior and indifferent beings*. Electra disapproves Aegisthus' and her mother's behavior because they disrespect and make a mockery of everything Agamemnon has built. Agamemnon and Aegisthus represent the two extremes of a scale: the former is the general and king who sacrifices all for the great ideals of State; the latter is Agamemnon's usurper who tries to preserve the citizens' self respect through his poetry and religion. Orestes affirms his attitude of non-involvement with either Agamemnon's or Aegisthus' systems. Orestes does not wish for any political, emotional or social involvement in world affairs, nor does he care for noble traditions. He is quite pleased with the idle life he leads.

Penelope:

*And, my prince, do you find the degradation caused by Aegisthus and his hysterical priests a better substitute?*

Orestes:

*It does not interest me. (P 9)*

In the last part of the first scene, a trumpet sounds and excited voices are heard because Agamemnon's fleet has been sighted. Electra asks Orestes to describe their father, *Oh, what is he like?... (P 32)* and Orestes answers her: *I know no more than you, Electra. We both have a legend, and now we must undergo the often painful experience of seeing it turned into a*

man. (P 33)

In the second scene of act one, Agamemnon is received by Aegisthus who makes an excuse for not having prepared a more glorious reception for him. But Agamemnon answers him saying that he does not desire such ceremonies - what he wishes to see is his family and not *royal carpets*. (P 32) In Oresteia, on the contrary, Agamemnon steps on the crimson silk carpet provoking by this act the envy of the gods. The king has been persuaded to do this by his wife Clytemnestra who pretends she loves him. She is universally known for having plotted with her lover to murder her husband.

Clytemnestra:

*Now, dearest husband, come, step from your  
chariot.  
But do not set to earth, my lord, the con-  
quering foot  
That trod down Troy. Servants, do as you  
have been bidden;  
Make haste, carpet his way with crimson tap-  
estries,  
Spread silk before your master's feet; Jus-  
tice herself  
Shall lead him to a home he never hoped to  
see... (O 73)*

In the palace, Richardson's Agamemnon is accompanied by Cassandra and waits anxiously for his family, confessing he is *nervous over this meeting*. (P 35) But, before Clytemnestra is able to welcome Agamemnon accordingly Electra rushes between them: *Oh, Father, it's true! I'm holding you; touching you with my hands. It*

*is no dream.* (P 37) Orestes does not receive his father well. He throws direct charges at him and afterwards he leaves the room and his family there: *...I wonder that you're now here playing the loving father who's missed his dear family...* (P 40) Agamemnon is disappointed with Orestes' words and does not understand his son's strange behavior: *But why should he behave in such a way?...* (P 41) to which Clytemnestra replies: *He simply is not anxious to endorse you either as a father or king.* (P 41) Electra tries to defend her father during the conversation:

Electra:

*Orestes, stop it. There are enough here who will say cruel things to him.* (P 40)

*Father, don't listen to what she'll tell you. Orestes was play-acting. He loves you and is happy over your return, I know that he is.* (P 41)

Afterwards Clytemnestra wants to have a private conversation with the king and asks Electra to leave them alone. Electra does so under protest. Agamemnon and Clytemnestra argue roughly: Clytemnestra makes clear that her feelings have changed during the last ten years and that she has a lover. Clytemnestra does not reveal who her lover is but Agamemnon wants to meet him: *...Can I not meet this one who proved himself the better man to Agamemnon's wife?* (P 46)

The next part is characterized by a long rheto-

ric between Agamemnon and Aegisthus who point out their political-philosophical-social differences. Aegisthus is Agamemnon's political usurper and considers himself the ruler of Argos. He proposes an agreement between them: Agamemnon will continue to be the Official Chief of State but under Aegisthus' orders.

Aegisthus:

*I'm not seeking an exchange of titles. I can easily rule Argos as a cousin...* (P 49)

Agamemnon still believes in his power and refuses the proposal. Afterwards, Agamemnon discovers that his soldiers have turned to Aegisthus because they are tired of wars and fighting: by now they wish to stay at home with their families.

Aegisthus has ordered a sacrifice where the armor of Agamemnon's soldiers will be burned as an offering to the gods and Aegisthus even suggests that Agamemnon could lead his men in doing so. Agamemnon rejects such an idea with aversion. Consequently Aegisthus forbids the king to take part in any ceremonies and keeps him prisoner in the palace.

At the end of this scene, Agamemnon asks Cassandra *...what will happen if I oppose Aegisthus?* and the prophet foresees a violent death: *He will kill you.* (P 58)

At the beginning of act two, scene one, Orestes

tells his friend Pylades that Aegisthus has decided to send him on a long voyage to deepen his mind and broaden his point of view. Aegisthus ordered this trip as a punishment for Orestes' poor and impertinent behavior during the official sacrifice. Pylades is supposed to go with the prince. Cassandra argues with Orestes asking him if he is really anxious about leaving Argos when he is conscious of Aegisthus' real reasons for sending him away. The true reason for this exile is to maintain Orestes far from Argos because the prince represents a great danger to everything Aegisthus has built. Aegisthus suspects Orestes' indifference and is afraid that Orestes will continue Agamemnon's policy. But, Orestes still maintains his position of non-involvement and answers: *...I'm aware of the grand issues I leave behind me but that's exactly where I want them to be.* (P 66)

Aeschylus' Orestes is also sent into exile, but while still a child, because the usurpers fear his presence. However, there is a great difference between Aeschylus' and Richardson's versions: in Oresteia Orestes is condemned to be an exile, while Richardson's Orestes *...wants to be one, emotionally, socially and geographically...*<sup>3</sup>.

In Oresteia:

Clytemnestra:

*...These fears explain*

*Why our child is not here to give you fitting  
welcome,  
Our true love's pledge, Orestes. Have no  
uneasiness.  
He is in Phocis, a guest of Strophius your  
well-tried friend, ... (OT 72)*

Cassandra, in The Prodigal, reveals to Orestes that his destiny is to be a hero. But, Orestes argues that his personal qualifications do not fit into a heroic pattern and that events of an unusual nature would be necessary to make him abandon his attitude of ironical detachment.

Orestes:

*It will take then a moment greater than those  
you have just described. (P 71)*

In this scene, Agamemnon tries to regain the composure of the legendary king, putting on his complete armor, in contrast to his gloomy figure supported by a staff on his arrival. Agamemnon is being kept prisoner in his own palace by his own soldiers and the king wants Orestes' help in order to defeat Aegisthus: *You will not stand with me and allow Argos to see that a new generation is willing to continue in my name?* (P 77) But Orestes once more stresses his position of non-involvement, reinforcing his argument by pointing out his reasons for disliking his father's principles. He blames his father for the death of Iphigenia who has been sacrificed to inspire Agamem-

non's soldiers; Agamemnon's legendary image has been built up upon the conquests he has accomplished, but thousands of lives have been paid for his victories. In short, according to Orestes' point of view, what Agamemnon offers *...is an unending chaos which makes improvement and justice sound suspiciously like destruction and rape...* (P 76-7)

When Agamemnon informs Orestes that only his death will involve him and will suck him into his current (P 80), the prince realizes that his father is not a mere dreamer and an unconscious instrument of destiny but a man who willingly adheres to his destiny.

Agamemnon:

*...My death will be a fact - there in front of you, and you will step neither around nor over it.* (P 80)

Orestes:

*And I thought you a fuddled dreamer who slaughtered, so to speak, by accident.* (P 83)

Agamemnon:

*One can be conscious of all and still dream, Orestes.* (P 83)

Orestes defends his point of view to the end when he says, *...his death will harm no one.* (P 84) But when Aegisthus enters with his soldiers to kill Agamemnon, Orestes tries to interfere saying that Agamem-

non is harmless. The usurper fears Orestes who could take his father's side, Orestes ...*tried to enlist your aid* (P 86) and is determined to kill the king - fear makes Aegisthus kill his opponent, as Agamemnon had expected: *Aegisthus will risk it because he is afraid...* (P 82) Aegisthus also forces Clytemnestra to take part in Agamemnon's murder.<sup>4</sup> While the cries of Agamemnon are heard followed by Clytemnestra's screams, Electra implores Orestes to help their father but Orestes is insensitive:

*Death is an ending, Electra.* (P 93)

And, finally when Aegisthus throws the sword into the center of the stage Electra repeats her supplication: *Pick it up, Orestes. Take it and kill them both. (...)* *You cannot leave...* (P 94-5) And Orestes answers simply: *No! Let it rest. Let it rot and crumble where it is.* (P 95)

The last scene takes place in Athens on a hillside near the beach six months later.

Pylades condemns Orestes for his desire to marry Praxithia, the daughter of a fisherman, to escape from his destiny. Wherever Orestes goes he is known as ...*Orestes of the Unavenged Father.* (P 97) And, by now, he wants to be seen ...*as Orestes the simple husband and doting father...* (P 97) Pylades cannot bear the idea that because he is Orestes' friend, he will be



left out in the world with Orestes' mark upon him:  
*...Pylades and Orestes, Orestes and Pylades - these names hang together, bound by your crime.* (P 98) Next, Pylades wants Orestes to think of what he has done and of what he has been doing in relation to his father's death. And, as they reach no conclusion they decide to separate.

Pylades:

*...I am no moral person, but would I stand by and see my father murdered?* (P 98)

*...Your father was murdered and you accepted drinking money from his assassin...* (P 99)

In the next part, Praxithia, Orestes' fiancée, tells Orestes that she is forbidden to marry him because the priests of Athens refused to give their blessing to the marriage according to the traditions of the city. The priests said that Agamemnon's murder was unavenged and that Orestes, being his son, shared the murderers' guilt. The pronouncement of the oracle only confirms the priests' words: *...The Orestes known to the gods is not yet born...* (P 102)

When Cassandra arrives in Athens she brings with her the money from Aegisthus to cover Orestes' expenses for another six months. But, Orestes refuses the money. Then Cassandra tells Orestes about Aegisthus' policy in Argos. First, Aegisthus had given Cas-

sandra a choice between hanging and exile, and she opted for the latter. Argos is living under the tyranny of Aegisthus' policy and the people are discontented. Agamemnon's name is scribbled on walls, sometimes with Orestes' name beneath it, as a sign of protest. (P 107) And finally, Electra is to be married to an effeminate priest. Orestes, furious, says that *...The wife of a priest makes an easier victim than a princess and daughter of Agamemnon...* (P 108)

Orestes is surprised because Aegisthus and his gods have not brought anything better to the city. The human and philosophical ideas of Aegisthus have not been put into practice. Aegisthus has become a tyrant and his despotic government is dragging the people towards chaos. This is how Orestes becomes *...the liberator of Argos...* (P 109) and decides to continue the *pretensions* of his father because he can resist the external pressures no longer. Yet he accepts his destiny under protest and for this reason he becomes a tragic hero.

### 2.3. GREEK RELIGIOUS AND MYTHOLOGICAL ASPECTS IN THE PRODIGAL

Through an understanding of the Greek cosmo-

vision, especially its religious and mythological aspects, it is possible to establish to what extent Richardson preserves these aspects in his modern version. These preliminary considerations will help to substantiate eventual conclusions concerning Agamemnon's and Aegisthus' political positions in relation to the scale of values of the two orders they represent.

*...Our race from its first appearance proved a source of irresistible fascination to the immortals...*

(OT 10) The ancient gods had great influence upon man's life and destiny. They imposed on man certain principles of behavior and man in turn tried various ways of influencing the gods to favour his accomplishments. Sacrifices were offered to them to try to win divine benefits or to thank the deities for a benefit received. This tribute to the gods constituted a connection between the gods and man. In very remote times, even human beings were sacrificed: prisoners of war or those who were demanded by the oracles or by the prophets to placate the anger of immortal beings. In Oresteia by Aeschylus, Agamemnon sacrifices his virgin daughter Iphigenia to placate the anger of the goddess Artemis. The king is condemned for this act by Clytemnestra, who cleverly prepares to assassinate him on his return. The queen claims that Iphigenia's death is the principal reason for the murder:

*... he must sacrifice  
 His child, and my own darling, whom my pain  
 brought forth -  
 He killed her for a charm to stop the  
 Thracian wind!... (OT 92)*

*The guile I used to kill him  
 He used himself the first, (...)  
 When on my virgin daughter  
 His savage sword descended,... (OT 95)*

In The Prodigal, Iphigenia is also sacrificed by Agamemnon, ...so that his men, inspired by such a sacrifice, would fight for the principle which had set them off again, sword in hand... (P 7-8)

In The Prodigal, the religious practice regarding the gods' interference in men's lives, the importance of divine sacrifices to the citizens, the degree of respect and consideration the sacrifices incite in people and the citizen's impression of the priests' actions and appearance, is considered differently in Argos and in Athens. Thus Orestes argues that ...The priests of Argos and Athens should meet to iron out theological differences. (P 103)

Aegisthus establishes an artificial religious order in Argos, which disregards the mythological and religious beliefs and customs of ancient Greece where political, historical and social values were imbued with religion.

Obviously, the religious attitudes of the citizens of Argos are coherent with the political systems

of each particular period. During Agamemnon's order, transcendental values have only a secondary significance because affairs of war and state are considered more important. The rituals, in the ancient state ruled over by the conquering king, have only a decorative and social function, preserving traditions and maintaining the solemnity of public events<sup>5</sup>. Agamemnon ... *recognized the need for gods. He went to the temple twice a year, and, if someone close to him died, there were, of course, added visits.* (P 19) Aegisthus' system, on the other hand, gives priority to religious affairs, although the extreme respect of the Greek people for the gods is not preserved in the modern play. Youth, in The Prodigal, which is represented mainly by Orestes and Pylades, is totally cynical and indifferent towards religion. Pylades does not respect the gods and expresses his contempt for the rituals when he mocks the smell produced by the sacrifices, ... *Are they roasting goats in Zeus' name? (...) The gods must be less sensitive to unpleasant smells than we mortals.* (P 10) In the same scene, Penelope continues the description of these ridiculous rituals by saying, ... *the drops of blood, dances by the priests, and Aegisthus declaiming his boring poems to the gods...* (P 10) Electra also expresses her disgust, saying that she is sickened by the rituals, *The odor doesn't sicken me as*

*much as the other things that go on at these rituals.*

(P 10) Furthermore, Orestes makes it clear that he is totally unconcerned with religious affairs: *...I ask nothing of the gods, if there are such things, but to be left alone.* (P 14)

It is interesting to observe that the priests, who should be esteemed and treated with consideration, are regarded with disrespect and scorn by the characters in general, even by Aegisthus. They are described as *...silly priests...* (P 2); *...the hysterical, verse-spouting priests Aegisthus has turned the elders of Argos into* (P 3); *...What we have now are old men moving their toothless mouths in incessant prayer ...* (P 4); *...three hens...* (P 30)

These elements - the rituals, the sacrifices and the ineffectual priests - characterize the irregular nature of Aegisthus' religious order. But the citizens of Argos are not aware of Aegisthus' political opportunism, accepting his policy as an alternative to Agamemnon's. Orestes argues: *...I have nothing against collective misery being turned to someone's advantage and called religion...* (P 17) Agamemnon criticizes Aegisthus' order as a superstitious reaction when he says to Orestes, *You don't care that Aegisthus and his priests will turn your home into a primitive rock of superstitious reaction?...* (P 77)

The last scene of the play takes place in Athens and Richardson, at the moment of the great dramatic metamorphosis and dénouement, goes back to the greek myth, transposing in his own play the mythological and religious beliefs of the ancient society.

The oracular force is a continuous and absolute aspect in Greek society and this mythical force is preserved in the last scene of the modern context of Richardson's The Prodigal.

In fact, the attitude towards religion which is defined by the intervention and invocation of the gods loses much of its peculiarity both in the context of the old system and in the new in the three first scenes of The Prodigal . However, in the culminating moment the oracle intervenes in the dramatic action. The oracle determines the cancellation of Orestes' marriage with Praxithia because his return to Argos as the *prodigal son* to revenge his father's death is imperative. It is also interesting to observe that the priests acquire the people's respect and their religious function is clearly determined here. In addition, according to Praxithia's words, in Athens it is a custom and tradition to go to the temple to ask for the priest's blessing.

Praxithia:

*We went this morning to the temple to ask*

*the priest's blessings of the marriage. It is a custom in Athens, and my father is a good citizen who always follows the laws and traditions of the city. (...) They forbade the marriage entirely. (...) My father made the priests consult the oracle, and when they did, the pronouncement was; The Orestes known to the gods is not yet born... (P 102)*

There are some implicit values in the internal structure of Greek tragedy such as *hybris* and *nēmesis* - the pride and presumption of men - which are repelled by the gods through a fatal reprisal. This is the characteristic atmosphere of Aeschylus' Oresteia. In The Prodigal there are some residual elements which can be easily identified with these Greek elements.

The proud and legendary king reflects the mythological *hybris* although on his arrival he is indifferent to superfluous ornaments such as *royal carpets*. (P 34)

On the other hand, it is known that the legendary king sacrificed his life, his family and even his daughter Iphigenia to build up his *legend* as a great general. In his rhetorical argumentations with his son, wife and Aegisthus, he always tries to make clear the unmistakable position he has reached through the conquest of Troy. Besides this, he always has a word of praise for his own deeds.

Orestes:

*...I know how you suffer for things greater*



*than the life of a daughter. (P 76)*

Clytemnestra:

*...You had a world to create, and perhaps  
there was a place in it for a queen, but  
certainly none for a wife. (P 45)*

Agamemnon:

*So my glorious victory brings me this... (P 44)*

*With my family I could understand my limita-  
tions but with my soldiers whom I led home  
victorious, I cannot. (P 51)*

*And then if I say to you that I regret nothing,  
that all I have done deserves only praise and  
imitation... (P 75)*

Afterwards, Agamemnon puts on his armor in an attempt to rebuild his legendary image which is rejected in reality by almost all the characters, but which continues to be real in his own mind.

Agamemnon:

*...Yesterday Aegisthus dealt with a weary  
man supported by a staff. Now we shall see  
how he speaks to Agamemnon. (P 71)*

However, his attempts to set himself above other men are not repelled by the gods but by Orestes and more weakly by Clytemnestra.

The Greek people believed that one of the functions of the *Furies* was to force sinners to leave their homes. These creatures were essentially concerned with the punishment of kindred blood and with

seeing that vengeance was done - *a bloody deed calls for a bloody deed*.<sup>6</sup> Their horrible appearance and relentless cruelty became the safeguard of cities. One of the most intricate problems considered by Aeschylus was the transmission of family curses from parents to sons and, very often, from guilty to innocent persons: *...a single murder may lead to an insoluble feud and an endless series of murders in successive generations ...* (OT 17) In Atreus'house, for example, blood has been shed in three generations: by Atreus, by Agamemnon and Clytemnestra, and lastly by Orestes. Aeschylus shows that the Furies are inconsistent because they punish a son who does not avenge his father, and equally punish a son who kills his mother although they ignore the guilt of a wife who kills her husband, because he is not her blood-relation. This is an unacceptable situation and *...as Apollo points out, it implies a contempt for the marriage-bond and they are incapable of dealing with a special case like that of Orestes...* (OT 17)<sup>7</sup>

Richardson retains this mythological aspect in The Prodigal. During a decisive debate between Agamemnon and Orestes, the king comes to realize that only his death would move the prince from his position of non-involvement and force him to seek revenge. Agamemnon is fully aware that *...his death will create an*

*inextricable blood bond between himself and Orestes...<sup>8</sup>*

Agamemnon:

*My death, Orestes, will involve you. (...) It will settle quickly over your life. (...) You will no longer be the prince who laughs and stands aside, but the son who has not avenged his father's death... (P 80)*

It is based on this same mythological principle that Aegisthus announces to Clytemnestra: *Death will be a bond between us... (P 90)*

Richardson's Orestes is also pursued by the Furies which symbolize the conscience of the individual. In exile *the hero* goes from city to city, rejected on all sides until finally in Athens he realizes, when he is abandoned by Pylades and Praxithia, that his actions are determined by historical and social forces. Agamemnon's death creates an inextricable blood bond between father and son and forces the prince into revenge *...and although Orestes is unwilling to acknowledge his debt, his fate is sealed.<sup>9</sup>*

Compare Orestes' situation as characterized by Jack Richardson with that described by Aeschylus:

In The Prodigal:

Orestes:

*...I kept hoping to find a town, a village - any place where I'm not known as Orestes of the Unavenged Father. (P 97)*

In Oresteia:

Apollo:

*...The Furies will hound you yet  
Through seas and island cities, over the vast  
continent,  
Wherever the earth's face is hard with wan-  
derers' feet.  
Keep courage firm; nurse your appointed pain;  
and go  
To Athens, city of Pallas... (OT 149)*

Therefore, it is clear that Richardson pre-  
serves some valuable dramatic resources derived from  
popular Greek belief and consecrated in Greek litera-  
ture.

#### 2.4. SPATIAL AND TEMPORAL STRUCTURES

Greek spatial composition deserves more de-  
tailed consideration. Many classical tragedies are com-  
posed of three independent tragedies which are linked  
by a common theme. However, in the case of The  
Oresteian Trilogy written by Aeschylus the simple suc-  
cession of structures happens according to an absolute  
and indispensable dependence on an internal continu-  
ity. In other words, in Agamemnon, the first tragedy  
of the trilogy, the murder of Agamemnon by Clytemnestra  
and Aegisthus before the altar of the gods, the exile  
of Orestes and the reduction of Electra to the condi-  
tion of daughter-slave-choepori, represent an incom-

plete dramatic sequence which demands a continuation in The Choephoroi, the second tragedy. In the second play, when Orestes, compelled by Electra, murders Clytemnestra and Aegisthus to revenge his father's death, the action remains incomplete and awaits its outcome in The Eumenides, the third and final play. The three tragedies are therefore linked together causally and not accidentally.

The spatial unity of the plays is related to the thematic-dramatic unity of the trilogy. The environment of the dramatic action in Oresteia is: the palace and the square of Argos in Agamemnon; the same setting in The Choephoroi; the temple of Delphi and the temple of Athene in The Eumenides.

Richardson adopts the Aeschylus setting - the palace of Argos - in the two scenes of the first act and in the first scene of the second act. The author breaks away from the classical structure when, in the last scene of the second act, he puts Orestes - the representative *...of the disillusion of youth in the later 60's...*<sup>10</sup> in an open setting devoid of any serious link with traditional affairs of the world. But it is here that the man of the 20<sup>th</sup> century assumes his heroic destiny. There is, therefore, a functional relation between the scenery and the dramatic idea in this play. The palace of Argos is a very propitious

setting for the development of the action in the three first scenes of the play which require an appropriate environment: Agamemnon, the representative of the old order, the traditional legendary figure, breathes the palatial atmosphere with all its connotations and values. The prince, who is nauseated by the same palace, undergoes an existential crisis in the natural environment of metamorphosis - in nature and not inside the palatial surroundings.

The murder of the king by the new holders of power in the palatial setting is crucial to the play: the physical, political and philosophical death of the old king and of the old order he represents takes place in Agamemnon's own palace and with the cooperation of his own soldiers, the conquerors of Troy, who have now turned against him. The dramatic effects of this event on the prince, who still avoids taking sides, incite future argumentations, feelings, reasons and germinates a whole reserve of values which gradually become stronger and clearer, producing deep internal changes within him.

Richardson places Orestes, who represents the coming political and philosophical order, in a new, modern setting. The cinematographic environment on the hillside near the sea with an endless horizon is an invitation to consummate the escape and to perpetuate

Orestes' identity as the *prodigal son*: an escape without return. The sea, the coastal hillside, the daughter of a fisherman, Praxithia, Orestes' security in his ideas, the easy money from Aegisthus brought by Cassandra, are stimuli which create the great internal unity of the play and which justify the scenery and produce the dramatic expectation for the amazing dénouement. Richardson cleverly exploits the scenery as a circumstantial element of 20<sup>th</sup> century man, anxious to liberate himself from the palatial atmosphere and ready to assume his own values and beliefs.

Richardson has introduced two significant innovations in the temporal structure of the myth as it was dramatized by Aeschylus. Firstly, the author extends the interval between Agamemnon's return and his death from no more than an hour to more than a day. Secondly, he reduces Orestes' exile from several years to six months.<sup>11</sup>

The modern playwright adopts a new temporal arrangement for several important reasons. The first change occurs to serve the author's main purpose in the play - the development of the principles of his theory of historical evolution. By giving Agamemnon a few more hours to live, Richardson makes it possible for the reader or spectator to understand through an effective debate the basic political and socio-his-

torical oppositions between Aegisthus and the returning king. By using this structural resource Richardson points out the reasons for a later change in the political structures of the Argive community.

Orestes is an entirely contemporary figure who wishes to dissociate himself from the duties required of him by society. He has neither patriotism nor family feelings and looks upon Agamemnon and Aegisthus with equal contempt, avoiding taking sides. In prolonging Agamemnon's life, Richardson also allows the confrontation of ideas between father and son during which Agamemnon comes to realize he has to die in order to force the prince into revenge. This mythological aspect links Richardson's play to the Greek sense of justice.

In Oresteia:

Chorus:

*...While Zeus holds his throne,  
This maxim holds on earth: the sinner dies.  
That is God's law... (OT 96)*

Chorus:

*...If now, for blood shed long ago,  
In penance due his blood must flow,  
And if his murderers must earn  
Death upon death, and Fate stands so,...  
(OT 89)*

Although Orestes tries to ignore the real facts, his fate is sealed. The opposing views of Agamemnon



and Aegisthus force him to abandon his position of non-involvement.

Richardson's second change in chronology is clearly linked with Orestes' maturity. Because Richardson's Orestes is in his early twenties and is already an adult, he obviously does not need the long exile of Aeschylus' hero during which he grows up, and can be brought back to Argos only six months after the crime. We also have to consider that the interval of six months - a relatively short period of time - represents for Orestes a period of intense social, religious and psychological pressures which affect his current attitudes.

The palace of Argos experiences apparent tranquillity: the seemingly victorious citizens, Aegisthus and Clytemnestra, the mercenary soldiers who are adapted to the new situation - everybody lives his daily life calmly. Even Electra is forgotten in Penelope's company. However, Orestes prolongs his period of internal struggle as a protagonist of the play - he is the flood of action towards which the violent and polluted waters of the Argive world and of its outmoded values run. Cassandra comes to Orestes with the truth about Aegisthus' policy. Cassandra's arrival is decisive for the dénouement of the action: Orestes realizes that Aegisthus' gods have not brought anything better

to the city.

Orestes:

*Aegisthus knew I was in Athens?*

Cassandra:

*Oh, he watches your movements very carefully.  
I might say you are his favorite subject.  
(P 106)*

Cassandra:

*...Aegisthus has set about hanging those whom  
he calls heretics...*

Orestes:

*...my father's murder did not even serve that  
purpose? (P 107)*

Orestes is impelled to assume his rightful position by exterior facts and pressures: Cassandra's support; the inseparable Pylades, in a direct way; indirectly, the abandonment of Electra, and essentially, the frustrated experience with Praxithia. Richardson converts the anti-hero into a hero without a pedestal; the prince will be known as the revenger of his father instead of *Orestes of the Unavenged Father*. (P 97)

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> ZUR BONSEN, F. Literaturkunde: Leitsagen der deutschen Literaturgeschichte. 5.Aufl. Berlin, Union Deutsche Verlagsgesellschaft, 1925. p.123.

<sup>2</sup> Prometheus knew an ancient prophecy, revealed to him by his mother which foresaw the ultimate downfall of Zeus unless he were warned in time. After a thousand years Prometheus decided to reveal the prophesy to Zeus. It concerned one of the sea-nymphs named Thetis, whose destiny was *to bear a son greater than his father*. Zeus was advised just in time because he was already enamoured of this nymph. Zeus immediately chose a mortal husband for Thetis, a young man called Peleus. The Olympian deities were delighted with this happy dénouement and agreed to attend the wedding-feast. Eris, the goddess of strife, was not invited but she came to the party and threw on to the table a golden apple inscribed *For the fairest*. Hera, Athene and Aphrodite quarrelled for possession of the apple. Zeus sent them to the most beautiful of mortal youths, Paris, the son of Priam of Troy. Each goddess offered Paris a bribe: Hera offered supremacy in government; Athene supremacy in war; Aphrodite offered him the most beautiful of all women for his life. Paris gave the apple to Aphrodite.

{OT 11}

<sup>3</sup> DEBUSSCHER, Gilbert. Modern Masks of Orestes: *The Flies* and *The Prodigal*. Modern Drama. 12:316, Dec. 1969.

<sup>4</sup> In the Oresteian Trilogy Aegisthus helps Clytemnestra to plot the murder but the queen confesses that she has been preparing Agamemnon's death for a long time. Clytemnestra herself has murdered the king,

*...And she who hunts is she who shared his bed  
... (OT 81)*

*How else, when one prepares death for an  
enemy  
Who seems a friend - how else net round the  
deadly trap  
High enough to forestall the victim's highest  
leap?  
A great while I have pondered on this trial  
of strength.  
At long last the pitched battle came, and  
victory... (OT 90)*

<sup>5</sup> DEBUSSCHER, p.312.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p.310.

<sup>7</sup> Chorus:

*We hound matricides to exile.*

Apollo:

*And when wife kills husband, what of her?*

Chorus:

*They are not kin; therefore such blood is not  
self-spilt.*

Apollo:

*Then you dishonour and annul the marriage-  
bond...(OT 154)*

<sup>8</sup> DEBUSSCHER, p.310.

<sup>9</sup> DEBUSSCHER, p.310.

<sup>10</sup> BRADISH, Gaynor F. & RICHARDSON, Jack. In: VISON. James. ed. Contemporary Dramatists. London, St. James Press, 1973. p.648.

<sup>11</sup> DEBUSSCHER, p.310.

### 3. AN OUTLINE OF THE CHARACTERS IN AESCHYLUS AND IN RICHARDSON

#### 3.1. GENERAL COMMENTS

An individual is characterized by what he thinks and feels and the way he acts. Personal actions, attitudes and beliefs are shaped by social, political and family circumstances. Raúl H. Castagnino says that a character reveals himself by his presence. When he acts he expresses a line of behavior and reveals his character.<sup>1</sup> The same author comments on the Latin expression *vita in motu* arguing that the mobility of a character is a result of the conflict of passions in his soul which are in harmony with or contradict exterior circumstances.<sup>2</sup> The political attitudes, psychological reactions and philosophy of Richardson's characters, particularly Agamemnon, Aegisthus and Orestes, are a result of their personal tendencies which are strongly determined by circumstantial forces. Accordingly, Orestes seeks to dissociate himself from the social, political and religious duties society requires of him. But the murder of his father compels him to partici-

pate in the battle of extremes he had sought to avoid.  
*...In Richardson the philosophy of determinism is placed on a purely temporal level: there is nothing to prevent man doing as he pleases except the laws and conventions of society, but these bind him as effectively as the vague cosmic forces of the metaphisicians .*

According to Jules Verest, each character should have a very definite and distinctive mark which is revealed by the action and is maintained in its course.<sup>4</sup> The character reveals himself by a prevalent feature which is a fusion of all the other ones. In this way, Agamemnon, the conqueror of Troy, is characterized by the armor, the fleet, the spirit of fighting and the soldiers. All these elements, which also distinguish his political order, have the same dramatic connotation. But this is not Richardson's usual way of dealing with his characters. Beyond the essential feature he often develops several distinct aspects of each character. In this way, the author builds up a modern Orestes who reflects the circumstances of our century: Orestes' character is not rectilinear but full of oscillations, anxieties, uneasiness, negligence. Richardson's characters *...tend to be a bit fleshless and his lines often get tangled in actor-muzzling syntax, but despite these obviously antitheatrical attributes,*

*his plays are fascinating in ways that some of the cleverer plays mentioned above never manage to be.*<sup>5</sup>

In literature, the features which reveal a character are more vivid and animated in the theatre than in drama. The pantomime, gestures, facial expressions, and physical and human constitution of the actors, are a result of the theatrical interpretation and of the scenic circumstances which are essential elements in a theatrical performance. It is interesting to observe that Richardson is both author of the play and a kind of assistant to the theatrical director who indicates the motions, facial and vocal expressions, the gestures of the characters and the scenic situation. He also provides the characters' physical appearance. In this way, the author does not allow much choice or creativity in the director's work, although the scenes become more interesting to the reader because of such a technique.

*Electra, at this point a pretty girl of fifteen...* (P 1)

*(giving Electra's hair an extra-firm brush)*  
(P 1)

*(feigning an injured tone)* (P 4)

*(putting her hands on Orestes' shoulders)* (P 22)

*(smiling)* (P 33)

*(runs to entrance at right of stage and discovers that the guard is no longer there.)*  
(P 83)



Most of the characters of The Prodigal are the same as in the Oresteia by Aeschylus with the exception of Penelope, Praxithia, the soldiers and the priests, which do not appear in the Greek play.<sup>6</sup> The priests are the old men of Argos who could not go to the war. In this respect they can be identified with the chorus of the Oresteia in Agamemnon, which is formed by twelve elders of Argos who also could not go to the war.

In Oresteia:

*...We were too old to take our share  
With those who joined the army then...* (OT 44)

Among Richardson's characters, only Agamemnon, Electra and Cassandra reflect the steady weight of steadiness, of immutability, of classical continuity. They believe in and defend their points of view and support their ideological positions until the end of the play. All other characters move towards a change: the very Aegisthus, who starts as a *...creeping, crawling, microscopic figure...* (P 68) becomes a tyrannical ruler.

Of all the characters who appear in The Prodigal, only five will be discussed in detail. Agamemnon, the king of Argos, Orestes, the prince of Argos, and Aegisthus, the usurper of the power, will be considered because they are the representatives of the political

orders in the play, and reveal the author's theory of historical evolution. Electra, who represents the ethical conscience of society, and Cassandra, who is a prophetess with a special ability to foresee future events and who is a reconciling force, will be considered for their contribution to the dramatic development of the theme.

### 3.2. AGAMEMNON

Aeschylus outlined Agamemnon's character within the classical lines and the mythical context. He also preserved some essential characteristics of the historical Agamemnon.

Agamemnon represents the nodal point of Aeschylus's drama. The king's motivation is essential throughout the trilogy. As a dramatic character, Agamemnon cannot reveal himself by his own actions because he is murdered as soon as he returns from Troy. The king's characterization is built up from the other characters' points of view. It is, above all, in Agamemnon, the first play of the trilogy, that the characters discuss and comment on the king's deeds: the king himself only appears at the end of the first play when he returns from Troy. Clytemnestra's attack on

the warlike figure of Agamemnon is violent, although her anger before and at the moment of the king's arrival is simulated rather than genuine.

Clytemnestra:

*I said, not long since, many things to match  
the time;  
All which, that time past, without shame I  
here unsay.  
How else, when one prepares death for an  
enemy  
Who seems a friend... (OT 90)*

*Why, once before, did you not oppose this  
man?  
Who with as slight compunction as men butcher  
sheep.  
When his own fields were white with flocks,  
must sacrifice  
His child, and my own darling, whom my pain  
brought forth -  
He killed her for a charm to stop the Tracian  
wind!... (OT 92)*

As a matter of fact, the presence of Iphigenia is an essential element of the myth. Richardson's Orestes adopts this argument when he blames his father for Iphigenia's death: *...I give you the name of Iphigenia (...) allowed your daughter, my sister, to die, or worse, ordered it... (P 75)* In The Prodigal, according to Agamemnon, Clytemnestra wants to use her daughter's sacrifice to excuse her weak behavior - the queen merely pretends she is affected by such sacrifice. (P 44-5) In Aeschylus' play, Iphigenia's sacrifice is the mainstay of the whole dramatic development; in the popular view it justifies Agamemnon's murder.

Is Iphigenia's sacrifice also a determining factor in Richardson's The Prodigal?

Aeschylus' Agamemnon is *every inch a King* and he would have liked to be characterized as an extreme tyrant, but in general recognizes the necessity to make concessions to inferiors. (OT 13) The Argive people acclaim Agamemnon for his warlike deeds and for being a great leader.

*...Our King and leader absent... (OT 52)*

*...You deities who watch the rising sun,  
watch now!  
Welcome with shining eyes the royal archi-  
tect  
Of towering glories to adorn his ancient  
throne.  
To you, and every Argive citizen, Agamemnon  
Brings light in darkness; come, then, greet  
him royally, ... (O 61)*

*King! Heir of Atreus! Conqueror of Troy!...  
(OT 69)*

*...Low lies the kindly guardian of our state  
... (OT 93)*

The conqueror of Troy is the commander of a powerful fleet,

*...Menelaus and Agamemnon, both alike  
Honoured by Zeus with throned and sceptred  
power,  
Gathered and manned a thousand Argive ships,  
... (OT 43)*

This makes it possible for him to put his imperialist ideals into effect. State policy is above all devoted to external affairs.

When Agamemnon sets off for Troy, people are  
not entirely satisfied with his policy,

*...ten years ago  
When you led Greece to war for Helen's sake  
(...)  
We thought you wrong, misguided,... (OT 70)*

The citizens feel the effects of war on their  
own lives - many soldiers die, the children grow up  
far from their fathers, and many women become widows.

*...While through the streets of Argos  
Grief yet more grievous grows,  
With all our manhood gathered  
So far from earth of Hellas;  
As in each home unfathered,  
Each widowed bed  
(...)  
And angry hate prevails.  
They sent forth men to battle,  
But no such men return;  
And home, to claim their welcome,  
Come ashes in an urn... (OT 58)*

But, after ten years of war, the Argive people  
want Agamemnon to return, and long for the ancient  
times when Argos was ruled by him. Agamemnon is a great  
chief, leader and general. He carries out State affairs  
with wisdom and force, and has won glory and splendour  
for Argos.

*...Why, then I weep, to think how changed  
this house is now  
From splendour of old days, ruled by its  
rightful lord  
(...)  
Now Heaven bring Agamemnon safe to his home!  
May I  
Hold his hand in mine!... (OT 32)*

Richardson preserves the essential characteristics of the ancient Agamemnon when he builds up the king's characterization in the modern play. As Richardson assumes the role of a kind of assistant to the theatrical director, he describes the physical features of Agamemnon who first appears in the second scene of the first act:

*Agamemnon is between forty and fifty, still strongly built and not at all the idealistic buffoon Orestes has described. However, there is fatigue etched into his body and he supports himself with a staff... (P 34)*

Richardson's Agamemnon, unlike that of Aeschylus, is not murdered as soon as he returns from Troy. The modern author extends the king's life, and for this reason the king himself makes clear the essential principles of his policy, philosophy and concept of man during effective debates with Aegisthus, Orestes and Clytemnestra. His character is revealed through his own words.

Richardson's Agamemnon is firmly resistant and even preserves the classical principles and propositions when attacked by modern arguments. The king constantly resists the very interferences which produce the evolution and maturation of Orestes' point of view and consciousness. Through his rejection of the *legendary* Agamemnon with all his motives, purposes and

connotations, and his profound historical aversion which causes repulsion and distorts his image of his father, we see Orestes' consciousness and attitudes being defined.

Orestes:

...I have no interest in your differences  
with Aegisthus... (P 74)

Agamemnon is the central point of the dramatic structure; he continues to be, as in Aeschylus' drama, the dramatic motif, the nucleus of the action, the center of interest who would unmake any possible dramatic plot if he were not present. In short, he is the polarizing force which attracts Electra and rejects almost all other characters. Agamemnon's murder determines the subsequent actions and the dénouement of the play and makes it possible for the author to go back to the myth, preserving its essential mythological aspects in his play. For this reason, the author can also be identified with *the prodigal*, in the sense that he starts from the myth, introduces new arguments and propositions and finally goes back to the myth always preserving his own points of view.

Richardson makes clear that when Agamemnon returns from Troy he is anxious for a homely, peaceful life: a visible sign of fatigue. The very first sentence which is pronounced by Agamemnon on his return

is addressed to his family: *Who wishes such ornaments? It's my family I wish to see, not royal carpets.* (P 34) Later on, he confirms his real position when he says, *I would never leave Argos again, Cassandra. My work as king is done. I've brought all I can to my time, and now I would rest.* (P 36) The psychological exhaustion which affects both the general and the returning soldiers characterizes a critical moment in Agamemnon's order which shows evident signs of decline. Although Agamemnon, the very chief of the current political order, feels the exhaustion of the conquering phase of humanity, he does not consciously admit political decay. He believes that he and Orestes ...*form a symbol of permanence...* (P 78) and later on he acclaims: *Orestes, you are my son! We must be the same.* (P 78) In fact, the fundamental feature of Agamemnon's character as symbolized by his full armor is that he believes in history and in its permanence. The exhausted man who is supported by a staff on his return, reappears as the historical man, the conqueror in armor, complete with sword belt. The armor has a transcendental force which is reflected in the soldiers' and Aegisthus' reactions and commentaries:

Soldier:

*...Yesterday there was no spirit in him, but if he's put on his armor he could make us yield without a blow.* (P 87)



Aesgisthus:

*But the armor is an effective symbol... (P 87)*

*...Agamemnon's armor will be lowered with him into a deep and dignified grave. (P 89)*

*...Agamemnon has penetrated this far merely by changing clothes. (P 89)*

Agamemnon is characterized as being a great leader and the general of a powerful fleet. He sacrifices everything, even his daughter and family in the pursuit of his warlike aims and State purposes. Electra is proud of her father, but Orestes is cynical about his father's legendary image, and criticizes him either as a father and as a man.

Electra:

*...the greatest warrior of them all - our king, my father, Agamemnon, stood, calm and proud, while his fleet covered the bay... (P 2)*

Orestes:

*My father, the great Agamemnon, king of kings, master of the seas and brother to the gods ... (P 6)*

*...I was told how he, acting under the indubitable and humane principle (...) took it upon himself to clear the Mediterranean of pirates, and how nearly a thousand of our citizens sank, as immortal heroes, of course, to its bottom putting this principle into effect... (P 7)*

*...Agamemnon, my father? What does he want here? His place is on pedestals and at the lead of inspired armies... (P 40)*

Agamemnon returns from Troy to the peace of Ar-

gos definitively. However, in a decisive moment he feels the urge to reanimate his soldiers: *...If war has weakened my soldiers, there will be others who will follow me.* (P 57) Although the king is abandoned by all and disposes, according to Orestes, of *...a few old men and women...* (P 73), the king calculates his situation coldly and acts with prudence, moderation and wisdom, *...I've put aside active anger and thought calmly about the situation...* (P 73) and recognizes that alone, without Orestes, he is not able to face his enemy: *...I am certain, however, that alone I cannot match Aegisthus and the fatigued fear the war has carried into Argos.* (P 74) As Agamemnon is unable to persuade his son to join him in opposing Aegisthus, he deliberately goads the usurper into killing him so that Orestes' hand will be forced. And forced it is.

Richardson's Agamemnon is characterized and identified with the historical and mythological hero; he is the conqueror of Troy; he is feared and respected by all as a *legendary* hero and general. State affairs represent to him a primordial value and he is considered a great leader, although his political order undergoes a natural exhaustion on his return.

Richardson cleverly preserves the thematic structure of his play and the connection with Aeschylus' Oresteia when he makes Agamemnon scream Orestes'

name at the final moment: his cries are heard by his son and are understood as a historical testament. Agamemnon is lucid and coherent up to his death.

*There is another cry. Agamemnon screams Orestes' name. (P 93)*

### 3.3. AEGISTHUS

Although Aeschylus' Aegisthus appears very little in the Oresteian Trilogy - only at the end of Agamemnon and in a short dialogue in The Choephori before his murder takes place - it is clear that the usurper of the power rules Argos with oppression, slavery and tight control. People are discontented and anxious for Orestes' return.

*...Oh, does Orestes live? Kind Fortune, bring him home,  
To set against these two his sword invincible! (OT 99)*

In Agamemnon the Chorus is sung by twelve elders of Argos who are the representatives of the Argive citizens. Aegisthus tells them that he had planned Agamemnon's murder as a just revenge for his father's death,

*...I planned his killing, as was just...  
(OT 98)*

But, the people do not accept Aegisthus' excuses and scorn him for not being able to fight at Troy as a virile man:

*You woman! While he went to fight, you stayed home;  
Seduced his wife meanwhile; and then, against a man  
Who led an army, you could scheme this murder! Pah! (OT 98-9)*

Later on, the Chorus accuses Aegisthus of not having murdered the king with his own hands and thereby causing a woman to mar the earth with this killing:

*...you,  
Who, after plotting the king's murder, did not dare  
To lift the sword yourself? (OT 99)*

Aegisthus establishes a strong State in Argos based on coercion, tyranny, strong control, privation and depression. Clytemnestra supports Aegisthus' way of ruling Argos (OT 100).

Aegisthus:

*...Then you shall learn, though old,  
How harsh a thing is discipline, when reverend years  
Lack wisdom. Chains and the distress of hunger are  
A magic medicine, of great power to school the mind.  
Does not this sight bid you reflect? Then do not kick  
Against the goad, lest you should stumble, and be hurt. (OT 98)*

*...your childish yelps  
Annoy us, and will fasten bonds on you yourselves.*

*With hard control you will prove more amenable. (OT 99)*

*...Now, helped by his wealth, I will attempt  
To rule in Argos. The refractory shall not  
Be fed fat show-horses, but shall feel the  
yoke -  
A heavy one. Hunger and darkness joined will  
soon  
Soften resistance. (OT 99)*

The old Argive citizens in Agamemnon react to Aegisthus' oppressive words with direct, violent comments,

*You'll find no Argive grovel at a black-guard's feet. (OT 100)*

When the elders of Argos hear Agamemnon's screams as he is murdered by Clytemnestra, they foresee with revolt the future tyrannical regime in Argos:

*It's plain what this beginning points to:  
the assassins  
Mean to establish a tyrannical regime.  
(...)  
Then shall we patiently drag out servile  
years  
Governed by these disgraces of our royal  
house?  
(...)  
...A milder face than living under tyranny!  
(OT 89-90)*

The Chorus of The Choephoroi is formed by female servants of Clytemnestra. The libation-bearers who are also the representatives of Argives decry their miserable condition of slaves. Even Electra, who is Clytemnestra's daughter, is lowered to the role of a Choephoroi.

Chorus:

*...But I, since Heaven's will gave  
My town to plunder and my life to chains,  
Far from my father's home am kept a slave...  
(OT 106)*

Electra:

*...Our fate is known to the gods,  
And, slave or free, neither you nor I can  
choose or escape... (OT 107)*

Jack Richardson's Aegisthus bears the same tyrannous, usurping, ambitious spirit as Aeschylus' character. He represents the direct opposite of Agamemnon's image and policy. In contrast to the powerful, legendary Agamemnon, Aegisthus is characterized as *...a mixture of effeminacy and strength...* (P 12) During Agamemnon's absence he has introduced a new religious State and with his poetry he levelled all men merely *...by singing the absurdity...* (P 18) of life. Aegisthus presents himself as a reformer and innovator. But, after he has killed Agamemnon, he becomes unbalanced and *...has set about hanging those whom he calls heretics...* (P 107) Aegisthus cannot be characterized as a great leader who could inspire admiration and respect in the Argive citizens; he is referred to by Penelope as a weak charlatan who usurps Orestes' power and degrades his mother. (P 5) He is a presumptuous ruler who is completely sure of his position and power when the fatigued soldiers return from

Troy.

*...But against your husband I feel invincible... (P 24)*

The prevailing feature of Aegisthus' character is his hunger for power; he seeks absolute political control of Argos. He is interested in Clytemnestra *...only accidentally and only as an individual. It is as a ruler that he now wishes to speak.* (P 49) When he does not reach a position of equilibrium and people become discontented, he attempts to guarantee the absolute power over Argos by making his religious order oppressive and tyrannical. Orestes comments that Aegisthus is *...becoming more and more the soldier...* (P 85) Aegisthus hides his true motives, Agamemnon advises Orestes that *...Aegisthus, with all his talk of acceptance, is not walking with him along the banks, but rowing furiously in the middle of the river.* (P 77)

### 3.4. ORESTES

Aeschylus follows the Greek myth when he outlines Orestes' character. In Agamemnon the young Orestes is sent to Phocis to be brought up by Strophius because the boy's unfaithful mother and Aegisthus are afraid that the future inheritor of the throne will

cause them problems. But, when Agamemnon returns from Troy Clytemnestra pretends she is really upset because Orestes is so far away:

*These fears explain  
Why your child is not here to give you fitting welcome,  
Our true love's pledge, Orestes. Have no uneasiness.  
He is in Phocis, a guest of Strophius your well-tried friend,...(OT 72)*

Orestes does not play a direct, active part in Agamemnon, although his arrival is forecast at the end of the play. Orestes represents a light of hope to the Argive citizens and the prince's return is foreseen by Cassandra:

Cassandra:

*...Yet we shall not die unregarded by the gods.  
A third shall come to raise our cause, a son resolved  
To kill his mother, honouring his father's blood... (OT 87)*

Chorus:

*...Oh, does Orestes live? Kind Fortune; bring him home,  
To set against these two his sword invincible! (OT 99)*

Chorus:

*Not if Fate sets Orestes on the Argos road.  
(OT 100)*

In Richardson's play, Orestes, who represents the next generation, also causes moments of instability



to Aegisthus system, I am tired of youth as an excuse  
 (...) for being a danger to everything I have at-  
 tempted to build in Argos... (P 18) But, in fact, O-  
 restes is not interested in taking sides.

Aeschylus' Orestes is imbued with profound re-  
 ligious feeling,

*Zeus, Zeus! Behold us, and the deed we under-  
 take...* (OT 112)

So that, when he discovers that he ...is an instrument  
 in Apollo's ruthless hand... (OT 30), he ...cou-  
 rageously accepts that Fate has laid upon him... (OT 30),  
 although he is conscious of a son's duty. In the final  
 play, it is understood ...that it is his heroic suf-  
 fering that completes the expiation of the curse, and  
 vindicates the justice of the ultimate settlement. (OT  
 30) The prince does not act according to his own will  
 but he is impelled by Apollo's hand. Orestes himself  
 confesses that his act of matricide has the complicity  
 of gods:

...It was no sin to kill my mother, who was  
 herself  
 Marked with my father's blood, unclean, ab-  
 horred by gods.  
 And, for the spells that nerved me to this  
 dreadful act,  
 I offer, in full warrant, Apollo Loxias,  
 Who from his Phythian oracle revealed to me  
 That if I did this deed I should be clear of  
 blame;... (OT 141)

Aeschylus' Orestes is impelled by divine forces.

*...Acting on it, Apollo has introduced Orestes to kill his mother; an act which Orestes himself abhors as deeply as everyone who hears of it, as an offense against the tenderest of all natural affections... (OT 18)* Richardson's Orestes, on the contrary, maintains his position of non-involvement against family and social forces - this will prevail until the beginning of the last scene. In this scene he is compelled by social and historical determinism which oblige him to act even against his will. *The seeming inevitability of Orestes' decision is doubly reinforced in the play by the revenge theme of the myth and by the return of the Biblical reference to the prodigal son, and at the play's close Orestes identifies his own decision with the general fate of man.*<sup>7</sup>

Is Richardson's Orestes tragic? Is he predestined? What does Agamemnon's death represent in the accomplishment of Orestes' fate? Is he impelled by transcendental forces or by historical and social determinism?

Orestes of both plays is subjected to the laws of fatality. Richardson's character suffers the effects of his destiny - *...not the destiny the gods have mapped out for him, as in the ancient Greek plays, but the destiny required of him by the conventions of society...*<sup>8</sup>

Aeschylus' Orestes is revengeful, cold and direct. Before the murder takes place, the prince blames Clytemnestra for having abandoned him while he was a little child,

*I was born free; you sold my body and my throne. (OT 37)*

For a moment, Orestes is doubtful and irresolute and pleads to Pylades:

*Pylades, what shall I do? To kill a mother is terrible.  
Shall I show mercy? (OT 136)*

Orestes accuses his mother of her own death:

*It will be your own hand that strikes you dead, not mine. (OT 137)*

After Orestes kills Clytemnestra, he hears the voice of his conscience. He is disturbed and confused,

*Is she guilty or not guilty?... (OT 141)*

Although he was impelled to take revenge by metaphysical and divine forces, the Furies pursue him when he rushes away. Richardson's Orestes, on the contrary, does not accept his new role and decides to act because of the external forces which compel him back to Argos, *Everywhere I run, I am blocked, and, bit by bit, I come closer to Argos...* (P 108) Orestes is determined by historical, social and circumstantial

forces and has no choice:

*The world demands that we inherit the pre-  
tensions of our fathers, that we go on  
killing in the name of ancient illusions  
about ourselves...* (P 109)

*...You know I have no choice, don't you,  
Cassandra?* (P 110)

*...To please all, I must write to your re-  
turn...* (P 112)

Richardson's Orestes is cynical and rejects his father and the traditional values. The prince is indolent and voluptuous and is pleased with ordinary pleasures.

*...Dedicated virgins are much more appealing  
than dedicated generals.* (P 9)

*...I'll join Pylades and the slaves.* (P 21)

*...Orestes is going to walk peacefully along  
the shore.* (P 77)

Orestes is completely indifferent and defends his policy of non-involvement with both parties. If the prince had to decide between the *legendary* values of Agamemnon and Aegisthus' state religion, *...the only choice* would be *anger or laughter...* (P 68) Later on, Orestes defines his political position: *...First, I have no interest in your differences with Aegisthus; second, if I did, it would be to form a third party to hang you both...* (P 74) The prince is completely disconnected from any profound religious feeling; he

scorns the gods and the sacrifices carried out by Aegisthus: *...I do as little commerce with the gods as possible these days.* (P 14)

From the middle of the first scene of the second act, Orestes shows signs of a possible change. Firstly, the prince still considers himself inflexible when he affirms to Agamemnon with security: *You are mad if you believe that.* (P 79) But, later the prince reacts perplexed: *I kill Aegisthus for the coming world?* (P 81) Then, he discovers values in his father, *And I thought you a fuddled dreamer who slaughtered, so to speak, by accident.* (P 83) Orestes even uses an affective adjective regarding his father, *Then, dear father...* (P 83) and later on, he admits that *You have given me my first true feeling.* (P 83) Before Agamemnon's murder, Orestes defends his father when he denies the false reports:

*...I don't know what gossip your guard has spread, but it is of little consequence.* (P 86)

*Believe me, Aegisthus, he is harmless.* (P 86)

Cassandra realizes the change in Orestes and points it out to him: *It seems you're taking a greater interest in family affairs, Orestes.* (P 90) Orestes answers her confirming the prophetess's suspicion: *...You can guess why, can't you? (...) I, more than Agamemnon, am*

*threatened by our poet's sword. (P 90-1) Finally, Agamemnon's legend acquires life for Orestes and it is transformed into man, Is it possible that a legend can bleed? (P 94)*

The final, definite change takes place in the last scene of the play after six months of exile. Orestes is in Athens and tries to escape from the external determining force by his marriage with Praxithia, the daughter of a fisherman: *Perhaps when others see me as Orestes the simple husband and doting father (...) - perhaps they'll stop thinking of me as one meant for thundering deeds. Perhaps they'll see me as a man like any other... (P 97)*

Orestes undergoes the pressures of the external forces: the prince argues with Pylades, his best friend; Praxithia is forbidden to marry Orestes; Orestes knows through Cassandra that Electra is to be married to an old priest; Aegisthus has established a despotic government in Argos and people are discontented. Orestes is compelled to assume his real position; he feels that a definitive change is imminent and reveals to his fiancée: *...Perhaps the oracle spoke correctly. Perhaps the true Orestes, the divine Orestes, is not yet born. And when he is, I doubt you'd love him. (P 104)* In a violent and definite change, Orestes, who has easily accepted the idea of

escape through travel, money and marriage, recomposes himself resolutely: *You can keep the purse, I no longer need his money* (P 106) although he recognizes his intimate frustration when he thinks: *...I loved her (...) children (...) stories with happy endings (...) small garden (...) watch conception, birth, decay and death, and to give myself to the same process.* (P 107)

Orestes decides to return to Argos to avenge Agamemnon's murder and to assume his rightful position on the Argive throne. Cassandra asks Orestes: *You see yourself as the liberator of Argos?* (P 109) to which Orestes replies: *Why not? The world sees me thus ...*

(P 109) Later on, Orestes vacillates once more, *...Tell me that if I don't return I merely postpone by refusal what I must become.* (P 110) After Cassandra has given a detailed exposition, Orestes concludes *So I am to play this role and no other. Congratulations, King Agamemnon! We have heard the future's judgement.* (P 112)

Orestes, who is characterized from the beginning of the play by his indifferent, cynical attitude towards the realities of his life and of the palace court, does not desire any social, political or emotional involvement in world affairs and has no interest in the noble traditions. But he carries the historical and mythological burden of his own name and is predestined to assume the role of a hero and to be

identified with the deeds of the Orestes of Greek mythology. So, he confronts his fate fixed from the beginning - he is determined to revenge his father's death and to *...wear the birthmarks of a hero...* (P 107) Orestes decides to act at the end and to assume his heroic personality against his own will and principles owing to the external pressures which force him back to Argos. But he does not achieve his freedom by this act because he had not acted according to his own will *...I will do so under protest...* (P 113) and for this reason he condemns himself to be a mere object in the course of history. This is the ironic tragedy of Orestes: his apparent freedom at the beginning turns into slavery at the end.

In short, the personal features of Orestes' character in the Oresteia are simple, linear and foreseen, and they constitute a secure unity of characterization. Within the trilogy, Orestes assumes from the beginning of The Choephoroi, the role of protagonist. In Agamemnon the main role is performed by Clytemnestra.

Aeschylus' Orestes, like Richardson's, can also be considered a *prodigal* who is sent to foreign lands and returns to Argos to fulfil his role as revenger, stimulated by Electra, but above all, directed and impelled by Loxias and by the Oracle. In contrast,



Richardson's Orestes is a citizen of modernity: his character is not rectilinear, but full of oscillations, uneasiness, anxiety.

### 3.5. ELECTRA

Electra, who is lowered to the condition of a libation-bearer, only appears in the second play of Aeschylus' trilogy, The Choephoroi. She plays an important and prevailing role, when she incites Orestes to revenge, revealing a great love for him and for Agamemnon. But she detests Aegisthus and Clytemnestra who have banished Orestes and have made her a slave. She hopes for Orestes' return.

*...Take pity on me and on Orestes your own son.  
How shall we two possess our home? We are homeless both,  
Sold by our mother - her price Aegisthus, who murdered you.  
I live like a slave; Orestes, banished, disinherited;  
They, arrogant, vicious, glitter in the wealth you won.  
Father, let some good chance bring Orestes here!... (OT 108)*

In The Prodigal, Richardson plays down Electra's role in comparison to her active, propelling voice in Aeschylus' The Choephoroi. In the modern play, Electra is the younger daughter of Agamemnon, who appears as a

pretty and highly sensitive girl of fifteen. Electra is child-like and ingenuous: she believes in her brother's courage; she is completely enthusiastic about her father; she dislikes her mother and her mother's lover Aegisthus, and at the moment of their father's death she tries to compel Orestes to take revenge with pleading words: ...*Agamemnon is dead. Pick up the sword, Orestes. Take it, take it.* (P 95) But, Electra is younger than Orestes and is too childishly idealistic and excitable to be able to prompt her brother to crime.

When Agamemnon was still alive he had told Orestes that Electra would compel him into revenge, ... *you would hear Electra's voice...* (P 82) Later on, it is clear that Electra represents the ethical sense of Argive society where problems are solved with simple acts. Therefore, Electra is not a direct propelling force as in Aeschylus' play. But as she expresses the feelings and desires of society which compel Orestes to take revenge, she becomes a determining and essential influence.

Clytemnestra:

*Electra is young. Things are easier and less complicated for her.* (P 39)

Cassandra:

*And now (...) we come to the majority. They are the ones who have been struck by the*

*fact of murder and are this very minute preparing precepts that justify their wish to see you balance this fact with another. For them, dramatic justice is a none-too-complex equation which can be simply solved by death. They speak with Electra's voice. (P 112)*

In this case, what is Electra's real role in the play and what motivates Orestes to act? To what extent is Orestes influenced by the weight of public opinion? How far does Electra represent these social forces in Orestes' eyes?

Although Electra does not play an active, direct role in inciting Orestes to avenge their father's death, she is the representative of the social ideology which demands a simple and direct act from Orestes - the murder of Clytemnestra and of their mother's lover Aegisthus.

Agamemnon:

*There is one: Electra, and she will turn to you.*

Orestes:

*She is a simple child.*

Agamemnon:

*All the better, for she will demand a simple act from you - and will never cease demanding it... (P 81-2)*

An adequate understanding of Richardson's points of view of the important role society exercises in the determining of State affairs, requires a distinction

between two terms: *crowd* and *people*. The word *crowd* means a group of persons who are collected closely and promiscuously together or the disorganized multitudes which are conscious of their duties and social circumstances. This expression can be also used in the sense of *masses* and *mob* which have the same conceptual connotation. When the *crowd* begins to be conscious of its social, political and historical role in society, it turns into *people*. *People* is an organized and disciplined mass which owns an ethical or social conscience. People live in a community which is the aggregate of persons inhabiting any territory in common and having common interests.<sup>9</sup>

From a sociological point of view, we can distinguish the pedagogical worth of the drama regarding the acquisition of a social conscience by the masses, who, through the deep theatrical experience, acquire an ethical social spirit. Although they are in the same psycho-social circumstances of simplicity, they accept the ethical codes of sociability. The acquisition of conscience turns the *crowd* into *people*.

The people are always discontented and always demand a change, ...*The people are discontent as all people are...* (P 107). Even Cassandra admits that she is:

...no longer a prophet but a soothsayer. She

now tells people what they want to hear, what is the best for them to know. Doing otherwise has made her an exiled woman in her middle age. (P 110)

...And as the poet, she must understand those faces and see that they are masks for desires which, if she is to be successful, she must fulfill. (P 111)

...To please all Cassandra must write of Orestes' return, his use of the sword upon Aegisthus, and, since the public never objects to a bonus slaughter, she'll add Clytemnestra as one of his victims. (P 112)

This last statement substantiates the definition of crowd as characterized by primitive, barbarian, cruel actions. In The Prodigal, Richardson emphasizes the fact that the majority demands simple and direct actions which can be identified with the reactions of a child - Electra's voice reacting ingeniously and instinctively. Cassandra, who is more optimistic and idealistic than Orestes, hopes that in future the crowd will stop demanding cruel, violent acts, ...perhaps someday, through a chance collocation of atoms, we will have an audience other than the one we play for now. (...) perhaps there will be a majority who would see your return to Argos with feeling other than tragic... (P 112-3) But, Orestes speaks with a realistic voice saying that the masses will never be conscious of ethical and humanitarian values or, in other words, the crowd will not be turned into people, as Victor Hugo has seen. The equilibrium of instinctive, primi-

tive forces is not reached; the reasonable position which could be the result of the didactic effect of the drama on man is illusory: *the crowd* will never change.

Orestes:

*You dream, Cassandra. There will never be such an audience in this world. Not as long as one person suffers in it. The sea will never change. The waves give birth to their own kind and are rooted in one order. The sea will always roar with Electra's cry, the waters will always rush toward Agamemnon's vengeance... (P 113)*

### 3.6. CASSANDRA

Cassandra, in both plays, is made captive at the fall of Troy; Agamemnon asked for Cassandra as his share of the spoil. In Greek mythology, Apollo grants prophetic power to Cassandra, after she has promised to return his love. When she breaks her promise, the god spits in her mouth and dooms her to be always a true prophet but always disbelieved. She foresees that Paris will bring destruction to the city, that the kidnap of Helen will bring death to Troy, and that the wooden horse will bring the Greek soldiers into the city of Troy. But she is disbelieved and therefore can

not prevent the historical events. Both authors preserve these mythological elements in their plays although Richardson's Cassandra lives until the end of the play while in the Oresteia by Aeschylus, Cassandra is murdered by Clytemnestra as soon as the prophetess arrives from Troy.

In Oresteia by Aeschylus:

Cassandra:

*Apollo, god of prophecy, gave me this office.  
 (...)  
 He urged me hard, made warmest protest of his love.*

Chorus:

*And did you lie together? Had you child by him?*

Cassandra:

*I gave my word, and broke it - to the God of Words.  
 (...)  
 I had foretold already the whole doom of Troy.*

Chorus:

*Surely the god was angry? Did he punish you?*

Cassandra:

*After my sin, no one believed one word I spoke. (OT 84)*

In The Prodigal by Jack Richardson:

Cassandra:

*You're wiser than I was. I knew what would happen at Troy and had a hundred opportunities to leave also, but I had to feel I might be able to convince others to the idiocy which was to occur and perhaps help avert it. My reward? My countrymen thought me insane. I saw Troy burn to the ground, and just when all finally hailed me as the wisest of prophets, I was captured, turned into a slave, and my moral called into question. (P 67)*

Cassandra is an oracular instrument who correctly predicts various events at the palace. She retains her prophetic power even in slavery. In Agamemnon, the first play of the trilogy, she speaks about the curse inherited by Agamemnon, and foresees Agamemnon's and her own death. According to her words, Orestes will come to Argos to avenge his father's death.

*...She, this lioness in human form, who when  
her lord  
Was absent paired with a wolf, will take my  
wretched life... (OT 86)*

*I say Agamemnon shall lie dead before your  
eyes. (OT 85)*

*...Yet we shall not die unregarded by the  
gods.  
A third shall come to raise our cause, a son  
resolved  
To kill his mother, honouring his father's  
blood... (OT 87)*

In Richardson's The Prodigal, Cassandra is a prophetess who is completely conscious of the situation in the palace. She accurately foresees how Clytemnestra and Orestes will receive Agamemnon although her



words are full of double meaning.

Cassandra:

*Orestes will be to you as a god, and you  
will find Clytemnestra a greater woman than  
you left her. (P 37)*

Agamemnon:

*Well, can you explain that miscalculation?  
(...)*

Cassandra:

*Did I not say you'd find Clytemnestra a  
greater woman than you left her? You took  
leave a faithful wife - that you have lost;  
but in her place you now have a queen who  
can stand against you. (P 47)*

Cassandra, as prophetess, is the character who possesses a special ability to foresee the coming events, and for this reason shares the author's knowledge of the direction of the dramatic action. Guided by her knowledge of the future she actually leads other characters, particularly Orestes, to fulfil their mythological roles in the play. She foresees correctly, for example, that Orestes will change at the end and become a hero:

*Orestes, you're going to be a hero, but it  
will cost you a great deal. (P 68)*

*Heroes may change, Orestes. You might find  
it suits you. (P 69)*

*In that case, Orestes, it will be up to you  
to change... (P 69)*

In the last scene of the play, Cassandra assumes a very special role reminiscent of the Brechtian version: she no longer represents the role of a prophetess but takes on the role of a real and popular poet - she writes the drama.

*I am no longer a prophet (...) I will not prophesy, but if you must have drama, I will play the poet for you. (P 110)*

From this point on, Richardson abandons the mask of the traditional, aristotelian theatre of the three first scenes to adopt the present-time reality, the popular and narrative structure, the theatre of Brecht.

In The Prodigal, Cassandra plays the role of a moderator of the action - she is a person who gives support and equilibrium to Agamemnon and Orestes. She understands the historical dimension of Agamemnon and takes into account the surviving values of the *legendary king* - trying to induce Orestes to re-evaluate the character of the king. Orestes, who repels each of the other characters, agrees to enter into dialogue with Cassandra:

Orestes:

*I think one man contributed more than the ordinary share of responsibility to such things.*

Cassandra:

*Your father? Perhaps; perhaps he was a*

*great fool in many ways, but then there are  
so many fools who are small.*

Orestes:

*And harmless.*

Cassandra:

*Not always.  
(...)*

Orestes:

*No one forced the Greeks to become the cham-  
pions of virtue.*

Cassandra:

*Nonsense! Do you think that is what sustained  
the Greek army for ten years in the field?...  
(P 67-8)*

Cassandra becomes a kind oracular spokeswoman when she informs Orestes that he is going to be a hero. (P 68) When the prince reacts saying, *That's not only improbable but insulting* (P 68), she simply replies that *Heroes may change...* (P 69) The prophetess begins to extend a net around Orestes: she intrigues him with arguments, reasons, and possibilities while the prince tries at one moment to refute the facts and at another to consider them as remote possibilities. In short, Cassandra plays a very active role in leading Orestes to act according to his heroic patterns; she is largely responsible for his return.

Cassandra:

*...there is only one future for us. (...) I am trying to help you prepare in case you do find yourself acting a new part... (P 69-70)*

Cassandra:

*...To please all, I must write of your return, your use the sword upon Aegisthus, and, since the public never objects to a bonus slaughter, I'll add Clytemnestra as one of your victims. (P 112)*

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> CASTAGNINO, Raul H. Análise Literária: introdução metodológica a uma estilística integral. São Paulo, Mestre Jou, 1968. p.125.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.127.

<sup>3</sup> WELLWARTH, George E. Hope Deferred: the new American drama. The Literary Review, 7(1):16, Autumn 1963.

<sup>4</sup> See CASTAGNINO, p.126.

<sup>5</sup> SPILLER, Robert E. et alii., eds. Literary History of the United States: History. 4.ed. rev. New York, Macmillan, 1974. p.1454.

<sup>6</sup> Richardson employs eleven characters including the soldiers and the priests. The characters which are not analysed in the main part of the papers, will be described in Appendix 1 according to the prevailing features of their individualities.

<sup>7</sup> BRADISH, Gaynor F. Richardson, Jack. In: VINSON, James, ed. Contemporary Dramatists. London, St. James Press, 1973. p.648.

<sup>8</sup> WELLWARTH, p.18.

<sup>9</sup> FUNK & Wagnalls Standard Encyclopedic College Dictionary. 2.ed. New York, 1968. 1565 p. WEBSTER's New World Dictionary of the American Language. New York, World, 1970. 1692 p.

#### 4. HISTORICAL EVOLUTION

##### 4.1. GREEK HISTORY WITH ITS DECISIVE MOMENTS OF STABILITY AND INSTABILITY - (THUCYDIDES)

Thucydides, the creator of political history, was concerned with the formulation of a universal concept of the dynamics of history.<sup>1</sup> He does not conceive a new structure of State as a static process which is at rest. The State is a kind of harmony of natural and necessary oppositions and its existence is based on tension and balance.<sup>2</sup> This political phenomenon characterizes history from ancient times up to the present. The oscillation between one extreme and the other characterizes the periods of war and peace in which the returning soldiers and the citizens of a given society are affected by a psychological postwar process of exhaustion and fatigue. In The Prodigal the phases of stability and instability mark in a special way the political atmosphere which precedes the reformulation of ideological, philosophical and religious

values of Argive society after the Trojan War.

It is with a spirit infused with politics that Thucydides verifies the existence of phases of instability and stability which correspond with periods of war and peace, strong and liberal governments, the expanding and organizational phases of humanity. After a period of war or a long political phase essentially turned to statal affairs, people want a peaceful time, devoted to their household affairs. Thucydides bases this socio-political principle on the history of his own time.

At the time of the war of Troy, the society of ancient Hellas was still taking shape. *Before the Trojan war there is no indication of any common action in Hellas, nor indeed of the universal prevalence of the name...*<sup>3</sup> The population was not settled, migrations were frequent and even the universal name of Hellas only gradually acquired a distinctive feature connected with the whole people. The best proof of this is provided by Homer, who having been born long after the Trojan War, *...nowhere calls all of them by that name Hellenes, nor indeed any of them except the followers of Achilles from Phthiotis, who were the original Hellenes: in his poems they are called Danaans, Argives, and Achaeans.*<sup>4</sup> The Hellenes did not have a systematic or regulated way of life for many reasons:



commerce was not permanent, communication either by land or sea was hazardous, cultivation was troublesome because of the invaders, habitation was not fixed and consequently there were no large cities: *It appears therefore that the several Hellenic communities, (...) were before the Trojan war prevented by their want of strength and the absence of mutual intercourse from displaying any collective action.*<sup>5</sup> Owing to an ancient practice of piracy by land and sea, some Hellenes at the time of the Trojan War still preserved the old fashion ...and the custom of carrying arms is still kept up among these continentals, from the old piratical habits. The whole of Hellas used to carry arms, (...) indeed, to wear arms was as much a part of everyday life with them as with the barbarians.<sup>6</sup> From early times, Hellenes adopted warlike attitudes and this habit prevailed throughout the expanding and conquering phase of Greek history.

In that remote time, ...the Athenians were the first to lay aside their weapons, and to adapt an easier and more luxurious mode of life...<sup>7</sup> Thucydides makes clear that even after the Trojan War, Hellenes were still engaged in settling themselves and for this reason they did not experience the necessary quietness which must precede growth. As a result, the Hellenes caused many revolutions which provoke factions

everywhere.<sup>8</sup> This new political phase of Greek history can be easily identified with that of Agamemnon's and Aegisthus' oppositions in Richardson's The Prodigal, which also focuses on the effects of the Trojan War on the Argive people. Anxiety for peace after a long period of war, instability, and dispersion, is a natural tendency in man and therefore in history.

King Minos, who is characterized by Thucydides as being the first king to own a fleet and to dominate the Hellenic seas,<sup>9</sup> defended his waters from pirates. For this reason, the Hellenes were able to become settle and consequently became more concerned with the acquisition of wealth and the construction of walls to protect their riches. They were ready for a peaceful, organizational period.

Agamemnon, the very chief of the expedition to Troy, is characterized by Thucydides as being a born great leader: *What enabled Agamemnon to raise the armament was (...) his superiority in strength (...) which bound the suitors to follow him.*<sup>10</sup> Homer calls Agamemnon:

*...of many an isle, and of all Argos King.*<sup>11</sup>  
*Agamemnon was a continental power.*<sup>12</sup>

The reign of Agamemnon is considered by Thucydides to have been the first great Hellenic power. From a verse of Homer, the historian deduces that Agamemnon's em-

pire, which extended across the seas, was supported by a great navy. The Trojan War was the first naval enterprise of great style that Greek history had known. Before is there was only the domination of the seas by Minos in Crete, who put an end to the piracy of the semi-barbarian tribes spread along the coasts of Greece.<sup>13</sup> Thucydides describes Agamemnon's powerful fleet based on Homer's words: Agamemnon *had also a navy far stronger than his contemporaries, so that, (...) fear was quite as strong an element as love in the formation of the confederate expedition.* The strength of his navy is shown by the fact that his own was the largest contingent...<sup>14</sup> From these facts, it is clear that Aeschylus and Richardson preserve the essential characteristics of the ancient, historical Agamemnon in their own characters. Thucydides emphasizes the importance of armaments and the army in Greek life:

*Now Mycenae may have been a small place, and many of the towns of that age may appear comparatively insignificant, but no exact observer would therefore feel justified in rejecting the estimate given by the poets and by tradition of the magnitude of the armament (...) we may safely conclude that the armament in question surpassed all before it, (...) if we can here also accept the testimony of Homer's poems (...) we can see that it was far from equalling ours.*<sup>15</sup>

Universal history makes it clear that civiliza-

tions of every type since ancient Greece have always been confronted by a political dilemma: the adoption of a dominant, strong, authoritarian government which is, above all, concerned with State affairs, or a communitarian system which is devoted to people's primary needs. The opposing political positions of Athens and Sparta regarding the adoption of a state or a communitarian policy led to a desintegrating, fraternal fighting, which resulted in political and moral decay - the Peloponnesian war buried the bright century of Pericles.

*The growth of the power of Athens, and the alarm which this inspired on Lacedaemon, made war inevitable...*<sup>16</sup>

The dominant political conception of Sparta was characterized by a totalitarianism which subordinated its institutions, way of life, literature, art and even the individual to state collectivism. The law was severe and inhuman, private life was entirely regulated by the exaggerated interests of State, poetry was martial and heavy, philosophical ideas expresses the steady tradition, and sculptures were austere. In Athens, on the other hand, the field was open for the development of individual freedom: the State existed for the citizen. Institutions were adapted to current circumstances; the poets sang freely of their individ-

ual emotions. Liberal ideas created innovating philosophical doctrines; the arts were characterized by variety, beauty and elegance. The fifth century, the century of Pericles, represents an age of great splendor in literature, philosophy and in the arts in general.<sup>17</sup>

Sparta and Athens represent two opposing political tendencies, summarizing, according to some historians, the History of Ancient Greece. For several centuries these two cities constituted two foci of events in the political History of Greece, two opposite poles of cultural development. Plutarch sums up in one line the opposition between the political spirit of Sparta and Athens - in Athens, according to the historian, each citizen could live according to his way of life - in Sparta this was not allowed for anyone.<sup>18</sup> According to the Athenian conception of freedom, each citizen leads his private life within the limit of common interest.<sup>19</sup> Their opposing political positions represent and illustrate the political dilemma which concerns humanity. Which is the more efficient form of government? Is it the policy which turns to the state or that which gives supremacy to the individual and his needs? What are the consequences of each system?

Athens represented, in general, the adoption of

the humanitarian principle. But, the establishment of its democratic policy was disturbed by internal political struggles. Political freedom was to the Greeks an ideal of life, but it was only won by gradual laborious conquest. The reform established by Solon represented only the first attempt to ratify democracy in Athens. Meanwhile, ambitious and incompetent rulers and improvisers who were seduced by the search for power caused periods of instability and discontent until Clistenes gave definite political organization to Athens, which was the beginning of democracy. According to Athenian political principles the right of the stronger is based on the laws of nature. Therefore, Athens was a democracy only in name. In fact, it was dominated by an eminent man, a monarchy of superior political ability.<sup>20</sup> The ancient historian, who is a perfect connoisseur of the evolution of a modern state and is accustomed to seeing the dynamics of relations between States as a struggle of natural and necessary oppositions, finds out that the same principle rules the internal life of Athens.<sup>21</sup>

The political rulers carry out a decisive and essential role in the development of the political, social and religious structures of a community. Agamemnon and Aegisthus represent two extremes on a scale which cannot be reconciled. In this respect,

Thucydides regards Pericles as a great chief and leader who guided the State along a moderate course, between the two radical extremes. Although Agamemnon was a great leader, he was not able to keep control of the people as Pericles did. This Athenian ruler is recognized, above all, for this capacity to maintain his influence over people. He always had the political reins in his hands: when the masses wanted to take over control he knew how to frighten them, and when people were depressed he knew how to give them courage. None of Pericles' successors had such a dominant influence, without flattering the masses or surrendering themselves to their passions. In other words, Pericles knew how to neutralize the influence of people and their instincts, and to govern as an absolute ruler. In Thucydides' view, Pericles was an archetypal figure of the Chief and of the true man of State: he had inside him an ideal of the State and of Man.<sup>22</sup>

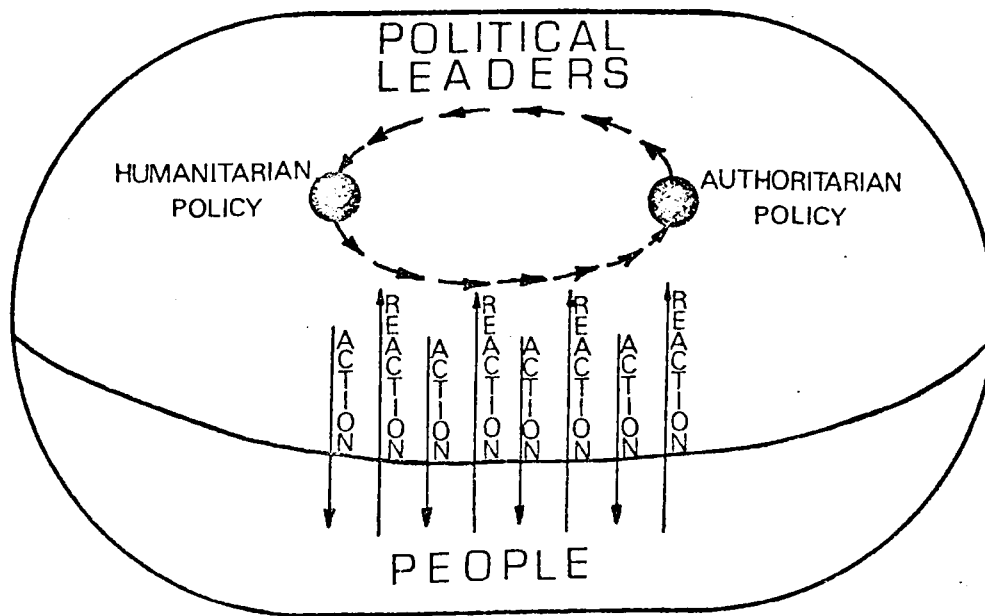
Politics, in Thucydides' view, is a world regulated by unique, immanent laws, which are discovered, not in relation to the individual, isolated, particular event, but in connection with its total, circumstantial historical course. Thucydides often expresses the idea that the destiny of men is repeated, because the nature of man is always the same: men react in

the same way under certain conditions - the same causes produce the same effects. Based on such a principle, previous experience leads men to the formulation of a universal concept which makes it possible to predict the effects of a coming action on people. This principle is essential to politics.<sup>23</sup>

History is a dynamic circle which moves according to a principle of action and reaction. A new idea which generates an action is already a reaction to something which preceded it - the renewing idea is a tendency in contrast to the previous situation. A new political phase brings in its essence a reactionary dynamic: the natural laws of historical evolution foresee phases of stability and instability which are a result of the ideas and actions of political leaders. Such leaders create a form of government which harmonizes or not with the desires and needs of people whose reactions cause the political, religious and social changes. The following graph illustrates what is said above.

No political phase is permanent because all forms of government are exhausted after a period of time. Democracy, for instance, is weakened when an excess of freedom leads to anarchy. On the other hand, a strong system destroys itself when, during a revolutionary phase against anarchy, it usurps and takes





advantage of the power to excessively restrict the individual and public freedom. Political history forecasts the natural oscillation between the two extremes - the adoption of an authoritarian policy which is directed to State affairs or a humanitarian policy which is essentially concerned with the needs of people: the former characterizes Agamemnon's order in The Prodigal and the latter is reflected in Aegisthus' policy.

#### 4.2. THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION AND THE THEORIES OF STATE OF MACHIAVELLI, HOBBS, LOCKE AND ROUSSEAU

Richardson wrote his play The Prodigal within a modern social-political context, that is, with a view of modern civilization in which the United States, his native country, has a prominent place. American society began the organization of its State and the structures of its democracy in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The theories of the modern state which were systematically examined and discussed in the determination of the political tendencies of the American State, came to fruition in the French Revolution. The political - philosophical doctrines of Machiavelli, Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau<sup>24</sup> divided the American revolutionary leaders into two opposing groups. Jefferson and Hamilton represent the American dilemma before two possible alternatives of government: the adoption of an authoritarian system which is essentially concerned with State affairs or of a democratic, liberal policy which considers the individual and his needs as its vital objective.

In the discussions regarding the ratification of the American Constitution, the Theories of State of the philosophers mentioned above lent support to both ideological factions. Thomas Jefferson's Republican

party maintained the philosophical ideas defended by Locke and Rousseau and A. Hamilton's Federalists appealed to Machiavelli's and Hobbes's principles of State.

John Locke states that the existence of government is necessary for the well - being of individuals in order to avoid anarchy. However, a political institution should be deposed when it does not function for the benefit of the people, but betrays their trust through corruption, incompetence or tyranny. *Locke confutes the traditional ideas of the supremacy of the state and the divine right of monarchies and elevates the concept of government as a servant of the governed, an instrument created freely by a majority of the electorate and dedicated to the happiness and well-being of all.*<sup>26</sup> In Locke's view, all men are entitled to life, liberty and property: this principle constitutes an essential part of *The Declaration of Independence*. Later on, *Locke indicates that he prefers a relatively permanent government such as that found in a limited monarchy rather than one which is constantly changing through either peaceful or violent means.*<sup>27</sup>

Jean Jacques Rousseau, a disciple of Lockes's, advocates a democratic form of government *...which will function only as servant of the people, (...) coercive and absolute government is contrary to the law of*

nature and should be overthrown.<sup>28</sup> He recognizes the necessity of government but regrets man's selfish desire for property which leads him to corruption and causes him to abandon the State of nature. According to Rousseau's point of view, the systematic organization of society promotes social inequality and therefore human unhappiness.

*It is only when private property is introduced that man begins to enslave himself and to lose his natural goodness.<sup>29</sup>*

*Government is an institution invented to protect private property, and thus has its origin in evil and exists to promote inequality. It is when government is destroyed and man returns to a state of nature that equality can be restored.<sup>30</sup>*

Therefore, the political-philosophical ideas of both thinkers - in particular the establishment of a form of government which is essentially devoted to the promotion of the individual's well-being and happiness, and consequently totally avoids the supremacy of state on man - gave support to the Republican form of government with a liberal, decentralized, agrarian economic structure.

On the other hand, the Federalists who represented the opposite political extreme and defended the absolute power of the state over the individual man, were supported by the other two thinkers - Machiavelli and Hobbes.

Niccolo Machiavelli says that the conquest and maintenance of power obeys a technique called real politik. The center of all policy should be the State in which ethical, human and religious values and concerns are irrelevant. The success of the state is of primary importance and only that which promotes the state is admissible. Machiavelli defends the concept of an absolute leader in order to preserve the progress and the success of the state.<sup>31</sup>

Thomas Hobbes advocates the same political principles as his predecessor. *His Leviathan develops a strong argument for benevolent despotism as the most natural and effective form of government.*<sup>32</sup> According to Hobbes, man is by nature a selfish being who is interested in society and in his countrymen only as far as they serve his own interests. The primitive state of nature is equivalent to anarchy, where brute force prevails. *Thus, in order to insure himself of a society where cunning rather than strength is of the essence, man surrenders some of his rights of government in return for protection and order.*<sup>33</sup> Hobbes thinks that the best form of government to maintain order and to curb the instincts of man is an absolute monarchy. The monarch, however, should be compelled to act in a way which promotes public happiness. If he fails to do this he should be deposed for exercising

his powers unwisely.

These four philosophers represent the two principle alternatives in the adoption of a form of government. This political dilemma not only divides the american leaders<sup>34</sup> during the Independence Movement but continuously recurs in all political manifestations of the Modern Age.

The Federalists struggled for a strong, centralized government with a powerful federal financial system. This last principle had its realization in a historical fact which determined what was later on considered a great conquest, the *American System*. *American System* is a synonym of efficiency, greatness and material progress. The corruption caused by incipient american capitalism led men such as S. Lanier, Thoreau and others to try to make the nation conscious of those transcendental values which are essential to the true realization of man and of American Civilization<sup>35</sup>. The american imperialist and materialistic system still prevails in present American policy. It is possible that Richardson, in criticizing in The Prodigal Agamemnon's materialistic and imperialist policy, is indirectly criticizing the disregard for man's transcendental and artistic values in present american capitalism.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, many political crises have

been the result of an authoritarian policy. The problem of force is at the center of the origin of war and public discontent.<sup>36</sup> But in some crucial historical moments, rulers are impelled to establish a strong state in order to defend the rights and freedom of a given society. The periods of war, the danger of an imminent invasion, and terrorism, represent a continuous threat to national security in the Modern Age.

After the period of danger has passed society turns to more liberal concepts with greater participation of the people, because the point of common interest is the improvement of domestic institutions and the progress of society through education, religion and institutions which promote social well-being. These psychological-political conditions explain the social phenomena which followed the wars of the 20<sup>th</sup> century - the second World War and the war in Indochina in which the United States was involved. The involvement of the United States in these wars caused exhaustion and fatigue with warlike tendencies - a protest against the obligation to cooperate with the warlike adventures of governments. The manifestations which repudiate warlike undertaking represent an affirmation of humane, authentic values which are directed towards social peace and well-being.

In the United States, the 60's were charac-

terized by strong opposition to the *American System*. The people rebelled against the imperialist policy of their government which obliged them to take part in the Vietnam and Korean Wars. This ideological conflict also generated the struggle between generations which caused in its turn the appearance of *hippies* and other similar movements. Within this political-historical-social context, Richardson's Orestes represents youth which avoids taking positions and ...*seeks instead to walk along the shore and adopts the detachment of laughter. But this modern stance, interestingly prophetic the disillusion of youth in the later 60's...*<sup>37</sup> And it was in this atmosphere of wars and protests against warlike enterprises that Richardson wrote his play The Prodigal.

#### 4.3. THEORIES OF HISTORICAL EVOLUTION - A. TOYNBEE AND CONCLUDING COMMENTS ABOUT WORLD HISTORY SINCE THE GREEK UNIVERSE

*Thucydides and his generation had been ahead of me and mine in the stage of historical experience that we had respectively reached: in fact, his present had been my future.*<sup>38</sup>

The contemporary phenomenon of a succession of strong States and liberal States is, according to



Toynbee, a continual process of historical evolution. Richardson reflects Toynbee's point of view when he presents his interpretation of the historical course of political changes.

Arnold Toynbee, among some other philosophers of history, makes a systematic interpretation of history. He is convinced that different civilizations which have existed at various times have passed through similar stages of growth and desintegration - Toynbee realized the closeness of his concept to that of Thucydides, when at the time of the first World War he reread the Greek historian *...and then suddenly my understanding was illuminated.*<sup>39</sup> The author comes to the conclusion that the process of historical crises which affected the ancient world presents the same intensity and characteristics in the Contemporary age.

*And, if this were the true relation between the Graeco-Roman and the Western civilizations, might not the relation between all the civilizations known to us turn out to be the same?*<sup>40</sup>

A. Toynbee, like O. Spengler, considers that *...the histories of all societies of the species called civilizations were in some sense parallel and contemporary...*<sup>41</sup>. Therefore, it is possible to elaborate some concepts which are continuously present in the historical evolution of civilizations of all times.

Toynbee also emphasizes the role ...of creative personalities in growing and in disintegrating societies.<sup>42</sup> History is full of examples of great leaders who directed the steps of their countries and influenced the ideas, thoughts and actions of a whole people. Thomas Dickinson gives a special emphasis to the fact that the period of American Independence was faced by great men at all levels. Rarely have so many capable leaders appeared together in the same historical context in response to the wants of the people and the country. These men served the nation in war, commerce, finance, politics, administration, propaganda and in oratory.<sup>43</sup> Jack Richardson in The Prodigal, also points out the role of Agamemnon and Aegisthus in the historical process of disintegration of one order and the growth of another.

The historical evolution of a number of civilizations can be identified by similar features: historical laws of challenge-and-response can be formulated to explain the outgrowth of crucial phases in a civilization's career. In a growing civilization a challenge meets with a successful response which proceeds to generate another and a different challenge...<sup>44</sup> This process of challenge-and-response stimulates the natural and continuous development of a society. This progressive course of events can be identified with

the well-known process of action producing reaction, the constant oscillation between stability and instability, which characterizes not only historical events, but all human activities. The historical process maintains its natural evolution ...*unless and until a challenge arises which the civilization in question fails to meet - a tragic event which means a cessation of growth and what we have called a break-down.*<sup>45</sup>

The Prodigal by Jack Richardson can be inserted in this context of historical evolution. When Agamemnon leaves for Troy, it can be supposed that the people of Argos are satisfied with the imperialist policy of their king. But, after a long period of war, the circumstances change and discontent spreads in Argos: people are tired of the war and are anxious for a period of peace. Aegisthus, who represents the new order, meets the people's needs with his religious State and poetry<sup>46</sup> ...*Aegisthus has succeeded Agamemnon on the throne of Argos not by sheer political cunning but because he embodies a new phase of history...*<sup>47</sup> This historical movement may be called ...*the rhythm of growth and the rhythm of disintegration.*<sup>48</sup>

Herder also ...*believes in laws of growth and decay governing the evolution of the national organism.*<sup>49</sup> An understanding of historical evolution is closely related to this concept because the cyclical

movement which rules the world undergoes a natural process of stability and instability.

The dynamic process of stability-instability is inherent in historical evolution as well as in human beings themselves. Neither man nor history ever reaches the ideal state which symbolizes a perfect stability. The natural tendency towards perfection represents the dynamics which is essential in the human being structure who seeks his self-realization. According to S. Kierkegaard, it is human to seek for Perfection as it is also human not to realize Perfection. The History of Civilizations is the amplified history of the efforts inherent in the human being in search of his realization.<sup>50</sup>

The balance between stability and instability characterizes the actions and reactions of an individual who seeks self-realization and of a society which seeks public approval for one or another ideology. Cultural history makes it clear that in this dynamic circle of actions and reactions even the most primary elements undergo a slow psychological wasting causing the inversion of their values.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> JAEGER, Werner. Paideia: a formação do povo grego. São Paulo, Herder, 1936. p.409.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.436.

<sup>3</sup> THUCYDIDES. The History of the Peloponnesian War. In: HUTCHINS, R.M., ed. Great Books of the Western World. Chicago, Enc.Britannica, 1952. v.6, p.349.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p.350.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p.352.

<sup>9</sup> GIORDANI, Mário Curtis. História da Grécia. Petrópolis, Vozes, 1967. p.52.

<sup>10</sup> THUCYDIDES, p.351.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> THUCYDIDES, p.351.

<sup>13</sup> JAEGER, p.412.

<sup>14</sup> THUCYDIDES, p.351.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p.355.

<sup>17</sup> GIORDANI, p.111.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p.150.

<sup>20</sup> JAEGER, p.427.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p.434.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p.431-5.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p.414-6.

<sup>24</sup> Machiavelli does not have a direct influence on the american context. But since Hobbes based some of his philosophical ideas on Machiavelli's thought, his ideas will be also discussed here. *...it will be sufficient for the purposes of this survey to think of American government as emanating from the attitudes of three representative philosophers: Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau...* HORTON, Rod W. & EDWARDS, Herbert W. Backgrounds of American Thought. New York, Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1952. p.78.

<sup>25</sup> Thomas Jefferson wrote the Declaration of Independence in 1776. The philosophical-political truths which are expounded in this document originated from the doctrines of Locke and Rousseau. The document of Declaration of Independence affirms, among other principles, that men have the right to their own freedom and to the pursuit of happiness. Men establish governments to guarantee these rights and their rightful power comes from the consent of the people. Whenever a form of government destroys this objective, the people has the right to change or to abolish it and to establish a new government. As a political philosopher, Jefferson was the first man to place entire confidence in people. All his writings and all his policy are based on this principle. He believed in the liberty of opinion, liberty of education and liberty of government. These three liberties are necessary to each other, and only through the first two is it possible to achieve free government.

<sup>26</sup> HORTON & EDWARDS, p.81.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p.82.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p.83.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> DER GROSSE Herder. Freiburg, Herder, 1954. v.10.

<sup>32</sup> HORTON & EDWARDS, p.79.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Neither of these parties finally triumphed because Jefferson, by defending a decentralized government created the division of states and the ensuing weakness which contributed to racial struggles. On the other hand, Hamilton, by establishing *The National Bank* promoted the imperialist and capitalist policy which violates human freedom.

<sup>35</sup> ARNS, Heriberto. O trinômio homem-natureza-Deus na fenomenologia literária. Letras, (18):135, 1970.

<sup>36</sup> JAEGER, p.425.

<sup>37</sup> BRADISH, Gaynor F. Richardson, Jack. In: VINSON, James, ed. Contemporary Dramatists. London, St. James Press, 1973. p.648.

<sup>38</sup> GARDINER, Patrick, ed. Theories of History. New York, Free Press, 1969. p.205-6.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p.205.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p.206.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p.207.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p.201.

<sup>43</sup> DICKINSON, Thomas. História da Literatura Norteamericana: dos inícios a 1930. São Paulo, Progresso, 1948. p.117.

<sup>44</sup> GARDINER, p.202.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.



<sup>46</sup> Johan Gottfried Herder's comments on: ...everywhere on our Earth whatever could be has been, according to the situation and wants of the place, the circumstances and occasions of the times, and the native or generated character of the people. GARDINER, p.202.

<sup>47</sup> DEBUSSCHER, Gilbert. Modern Masks of Orestes: *The Flies* and *The Prodigal*. Modern Drama, 12:314, Dec. 1969.

<sup>48</sup> GARDINER, p.202.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p.36.

<sup>50</sup> ARNS, p.128.

## 5. RICHARDSON'S VIEW OF HISTORICAL EVOLUTION IN THE PRODIGAL

### 5.1. AGAMEMNON'S AND AEGISTHUS' ORDERS AND ORESTES' POLITICAL POSITIONS

In The Prodigal, Jack Richardson tries to interpret the historical laws in effect during Thucydides age and which are confirmed by contemporary historians. Although there are a great number of references to Agamemnon's and Aegisthus' policy and Orestes' achievement of his destiny in the development of the theme of this research, I will reevaluate such statements in order to analyze systematically the political positions of the characters and to be able to make relevant conclusions regarding Richardson's theory of Historical Evolution.

Agamemnon and Aegisthus, in Richardson's view, represent diametrically opposed viewpoints. Debusscher affirms that one is the representative of the male

principle and the other of the female principle.<sup>1</sup> Accordingly, in Agamemnon's conquering stage of mankind, the soldiers put forth their virile qualities in order to fight for the great ideals of the world. They were always far away from their homes and separated from their families; in war they were supposed to act according to their primary instincts of survival. According to Penelope *The men of Argos left with Agamemnon. What they have now are old men moving their toothless mouths in incessant prayers or boys,...* (P 4-5) On another occasion, Penelope once again emphasizes the difference between Agamemnon's and Aegisthus' men when she says: *...I'm sure your father will return soon. And when he does, the old ways will come with him. We will have men to rule again, instead of the hysterical, verse-spouting priests Aegisthus has turned the elders of Argos into.* (P 3)

Aegisthus' system, on the other hand, appeals to female principles of understanding, weakness, effeminacy, prayers and poetry - he is the representative of the organizational phase of humanity. The priests who are, generally-speaking, the representatives of Aegisthus' order are described as having female characteristics. Aegisthus, the very leader of the new phase, *...is a mixture of effeminacy and strength. In the three priests with him there is no such balance:*

*the former quality reigns unchallenged.* (P 12)

The development of the action in The Prodigal is essentially linked to the war of Troy. During the war, the soldiers are led by Agamemnon, who proves to be a great, brave, idealistic general. His soldiers are also sustained, for a period of time, by this same spirit of idealism, exaltation and heroic deeds; they sacrifice all, even their lives and their families for the benefit of the state. But, when the war is over and the fleet returns to Argos, the soldiers feel they are *tired of that life*. (P 51) And, by now what they need is a period of peace and quiet dedicated to their families. Even Agamemnon, who is the representative of the *old order*, is seeking a family life now. The soldiers and their king and general are moved by a natural psychological feeling of exhaustion and fatigue caused by war. The *new order*, which takes the place of the *old order* and provides men with what they really need at the moment, is represented by Aegisthus, who apparently has a good understanding of human feelings. Aegisthus has clear ideas about life, men and existence, but does not put them into effect once he has conquered his primordial ambition - power. Unfortunately, Aegisthus is not consistent in what he preaches and what he practises.

Orestes:

*...Aegisthus may be less pretentious, and a better psychologist than my father, but that's all that really separates them. He knows my feelings about his inverted philanthropy. (P 68)*

Orestes, who is expected to react and take sides, is totally indifferent to what is going on in the palace.

*...I feel uncomfortable when included in world schemes. I wish my freedom to be indolent, unobtrusive and uninvolved. (P 17)*

Orestes' reaction is a result of the effects of the war on a person: the time for great heroism is over. The author creates the *anti-hero* which is very different from that of greek mythology. Richardson demystifies Orestes on purpose: first, the prince is the reflexion of an exhausted age which is not attracted by heroic deeds anymore. Second, Orestes does not accept his father's principles; the king sacrifices all in order to pursue his ideals of greatness. His son realizes Agamemnon's importance as a king and general but it means nothing to Orestes because his father's principles are not filled with a concern for humanity. For this reason, Agamemnon becomes an object of scorn and ridicule for his son. (P 6) Third, Agamemnon does not cultivate paternal and conjugal love in his family. For all these reasons, Orestes does not seek eagerly to adopt Agamemnon's standards of import-

ance and does not follow the king's principle as his own, but on the contrary, he embraces standards of *anti-values*: he is indifferent, cynical, weak, uncaring of traditions, and socially, politically and emotionally disconnected. In short, he does not possess qualities which can be fitted into a heroic pattern.

Orestes is not concerned with ethical values and he is not involved with either Agamemnon's or Aegisthus' political system. ...*His attitude is the result of a sharp awareness of the shortcomings on the two sides of the offered alternative...*<sup>2</sup> When Agamemnon left for Troy he left his legend behind, and Orestes knew all Agamemnon's deeds from the stories of his father's past epic accomplishments. Orestes confesses to Penelope that he ...*knows his father only too well.* (P 8) From the tales of his father's deeds, Orestes is at least sure of what he wants to avoid. The prince defines his father upon his return as being ... *a curio of folly that should be placed under glass and studied to be avoided...* (P 74)

The political system established by Agamemnon has as its main purpose the improvements of the State which are attained by means of external conquests, wars, violence and political imperialism. Man himself with all his needs and rights is placed in the background. Both the soldiers and the citizens, who are

dominated by the fatigue and fear the war has left them, demand a change in the political system and accept the opposite and religious state of Aegisthus. The religious system ...*is used by Aegisthus on the one hand to restore self-confidence and a kind of human dignity in the old and handicapped who have remained behind after Agamemnon's army left for Troy...*<sup>3</sup> and on the other hand to establish a firm control on the people's feelings. Aegisthus's system can be easily identified with a political opportunism which seeks to give security and peace to people in return for political power.

The crucial moment in the confrontation of the two orders happens when Aegisthus informs Agamemnon that the armor of his soldiers will be burned as an offering to the gods. He continues by saying that the sacrifice is an obvious symbol for all that the strength and belief in men who wore the *odd-fitting suits* are finished, and that greater powers will now control and order the world's course. (P 56-7) Aegisthus even has the audacity to ask Agamemnon to lead his soldiers in this sacrifice. But, Agamemnon does not weaken his point of view and maintains his proud attitude for his past deeds: *That you will never see Aegisthus. It was the arms of men that conquered Troy...* (P 57) Only Agamemnon's death gives to Aegisthus the

victory of his order.

Agamemnon's order is not defeated immediately upon his return and is not completely extinguished even with his death, because Orestes is predestined to become the continuer of Agamemnon's voice. The king's order is identified with the armor which represents an effective and dangerous symbol. Aegisthus has not been able to clear from the soldier's minds the spirit of idealism and fighting brought up by the image of the armor.

Soldier:

*...Yesterday there was no spirit in him, but if he's put on his armor he could make us yield without a blow. (P 87)*

Aegisthus, apparently, is secure of his position before Agamemnon's arrival, *...Agamemnon will cause no disturbance here...* (P 27) But, when Aegisthus discovers that Agamemnon stands against him, he is overcome by fear and panic.

Aegisthus:

*Oh, we shall kill him, friend. Agamemnon's armor will be lowered with him into a deep and dignified grave. (P 89)*

Aegisthus establishes the state religion and with his poetry fits people to fill out the emptiness and exhaustion caused by the war. His religious theories are convincing but the religious practice in real



life is completely absurd - religion seems to be an ungodly collective ritual in which connection between gods and men is achieved by *silly, hysterical* and *effeminate* priests.

Aegisthus' theory of poetics also seems to be very effective and in Orestes' words *...it shows man the limit of mind (...)* and his *holy need of the poet*. (P 15) Aegisthus himself defines his poetry: *...With my poetry I removed the word importance from the people's vocabulary merely by singing the absurdity (...)* *With my poetry I leveled all...* (P18-9) But, Aegisthus' poetry is of little worth although the reasons for its creation are quite acceptable. The priests themselves define Aegisthus as being *...poor at poetry and always muddles the rhymes*. (P 13) The other priests remarks on the statement saying: that *...the gods are not interested in our ability to match sounds...* (P 13) From the development of the play anyone can see that both the religion and the poetry fulfilled the people's need after the war, despite their low value as artistic or religious expression. People, in this historical situation, were anxious to begin a new period different from that of Agamemnon's. Therefore, they accepted the trivialities of Aegisthus' new order which suited the occasion, but only temporarily.

The most important point in relation to Aegis-

thus' policy is his lack of consistency and integrity: Aegisthus does not act according to his own principle. Aegisthus, for example, condemns violence, war, standards of importance and celebrates peace, quietness and standards of weakness. But, of all decisive moments, or every time someone tries to stand against his system, he acts violently towards his opposer and threatens him with death. When Aegisthus suspects that Orestes is just pretending to be indifferent to his father's return, the usurper threatens him violently: *...For, if you were this one, Orestes, I would order your death in an hour. Yes, and though terrified by violence, I would use the dagger myself.* (P 20)

Later on, Aegisthus establishes a despotic government in Argos: the people are discontented and demand a change and the beginning of a new period. Aegisthus leads people to chaos because he does not respect their needs, and does not leave them free to choose their own ways. Agamemnon has tried to make Orestes conscious of Aegisthus' policy:

Agamemnon:

*...Aegisthus, with all his talk of acceptance, is not walking with you along the banks, but rowing furiously in the middle of the river.* (P 77)

Orestes possesses a refined sense of criticism. He is conscious of the shortcomings of both systems

and decides to take neither of the alternatives offered by the two orders. Orestes refutes both orders and maintains his definite position to the end: he does not help his father, he refutes Aegisthus' religious state, but he does not try to create something better. In the end, Orestes himself admits the weakness of his act for not being able to create something better, ... *I will know it is nothing but weakness that brought me there in front of them. (...) I will do so knowing I was not great enough to create something better.* (P 113)

Why does Orestes not try to create a third political party which could constitute something better for the citizens of Argos? On one occasion, Orestes admits to Aegisthus, *If you mean I'm looking for something better than the present, yes. But after all I am young, Aegisthus. I should have that right.* (P 17) On another occasion, Orestes confirms to Agamemnon his position of non-involvement but mentions the possibility of a third party just to provoke his father and to show his scorn for both orders. (P 74)

Which is the real position of Orestes? Orestes himself admits his weakness in trying to create something better. But, why is Orestes not able to form a third party since he does not accept either of the existing orders? Orestes does not attempt to create a third party certainly because he does not believe it

would be worthwhile. He has many reasons for thinking this way. The negative experience with the two existing systems does not encourage the prince to look for something better. The two orders could be considered complementary in man's life: one represents the martialing purposes of a state; the other is the representative of the religious and poetic activities of man. Orestes, who is a critic and is respectful of human rights, is completely certain that these two systems, as they were established, do not fulfill man's needs. Orestes realizes that the political systems are deteriorative, oppressive and the rulers maintain their power by violence.

Orestes always avoids being involved by external circumstances. When the prince feels he is threatened by the continuous persecution of being known as ...*Orestes of the Unavenged Father* (P 97), he decides to marry Praxithia. The same happens at the end of the play: when he decides to go back to Argos he even asks Cassandra ...*Tell me that if I don't return I merely postpone by refusal what I must become.* (P 110) Orestes always tries to walk in the opposite direction from Argos.

Why does Orestes want to run away from Argos? Why does he eagerly avoid involvement in politics? The answer is connected with two points. First, Orestes

has a psychological alienation in relation to his father. Agamemnon, being a man of the state, spends most of his time in fights to establish peace and to conquer new frontiers. His family is placed on a lower level and this fact affects Orestes' life.

Orestes:

*...It has taken you a lifetime to become your son's aversion...* (P 75)

Upon Agamemnon's return Orestes emphasizes the difference between Agamemnon the general and the father: *...Agamemnon's place is on pedestals and at the head of inspired armies. No, King of Argos, it is rather late to clasp me by the arm and call me son...*

(P 40) Later, during an argument with Agamemnon, Orestes says: *...Ten years and a legend separate us and always will. I've grown accustomed to being alone and so shall you.* (P 78) Could Orestes be the symbol of thousands of children who grow up far from their fathers because of the war?

As a second point, Orestes, like the citizens of Argos, reflects the postwar spirit - in this way, Orestes is the reflexion of the very society which, in turn, is a consequence of the political system. *...Agamemnon's returning soldiers have spent their idealism and craving for heroic deeds on the battlefield and now dream of the quiet pleasures of home and conjugal*

*life.*<sup>4</sup> It is interesting to observe that the same thing happens with Orestes, at the end, after six months of exile. Orestes and Pylades ...are both tired of wandering from boat to boat, city to city, island to island. (P 97) Orestes, by now, seeks peace and hopes to get it through his marriage, *I will make myself this man, Pylades. I have to if I want to know any peace at all.* (P 98)

Agamemnon's death has the power to set Orestes' destiny: he will be forced to take revenge for his father's murder and to assume Agamemnon's beliefs and principles. The king evaluates this when he says: ... *But all the while it will be my death speaking and moving behind you.* (P 81) Electra has foreseen this at the beginning of the play: *We both need our father's return to become what we were meant to be. All before that is just play-acting...* (P 12)

Cassandra foresees that Orestes is predestined to be the hero Orestes of Greek Mythology. (P 68) Richardson, *By choosing to dramatize the story of Orestes, a myth whose outcome was well-known to his audience, (...) wanted to reinforce the impression of inevitability, of predestination...*<sup>5</sup>

Agamemnon has adhered to his destiny: he plans his own death in accordance with the rules of the game called history with such resolve that Orestes becomes

frightened and threatened by Agamemnon's death; the prince gradually comes to be more respectful of the power of his father's death and of his purposes, *You have given my first true feeling.* (P 83) In Athens, six months after Agamemnon's murder, Orestes ...*falls prey to a universal power outside himself, that of social and historical determinism...*<sup>6</sup> - nobody accepts Orestes' attitude of non-involvement.

## 5.2. AGAMEMNON'S AND AEGISTHUS' CONCEPT OF THE MAN

Agamemnon and Aegisthus support different and complementary concepts of the man.

Agamemnon has created standards of importance of the idealistic man he has conceived. For Agamemnon the worth of man is measured by the greatness of the deeds he is able to accomplish. But, in general, the average man feels weak and incapable of attaining Agamemnon's model of man. Aegisthus, on the other hand, removed the word importance from the people's vocabulary by singing of the present moment and the common and simple things of life. He considered man for *what he is* and not for *what he might be* (P 54); he levelled all men with his poetry and religion and he esteems the man's worth by the ordinary things he is really able

to do. One is idealistic, the other is realistic.

Aegisthus:

*...The war had produced a mixed generation of frightened outcasts who had nothing to help them but your father's outmoded standards of importance. They were weak, and Agamemnon's model of man made them ashamed of their weakness.*

Orestes:

*Yes, yes. My father's principles are not filled with pity. I won't argue that.*

Aegisthus:

*...With my poetry I removed the word importance from the people's vocabulary merely by singing the absurdity, and hence equality, of all life centered about man. (...) I sang the praises of the immediate and trivial. (...) With my poetry I levelled all, and for those whose temperaments were not suited to lyrical medium I brought a religion which confirmed all more melodic truths. [P 18-9]*

Aegisthus points out the fact that his desire to govern is inextricable from the humility Agamemnon has always noticed in him. (P 49) And, he continues defending his point of view saying that he becomes a leader because he does not consider himself better than the people he wishes to rule. His only quality as a leader is in his equality with those he leads. (P 50) Agamemnon, on the other hand, considers himself a superior leader - *...You honored me as your leader and I repected you as soldiers...* (P 50)

Aegisthus argues with Agamemnon saying that



Agamemnon has failed because he has been indifferent to the characteristics of men. (P 54) But, is Agamemnon really indifferent to man? In fact, Agamemnon has always been involved in man's problems. But, Agamemnon's interest in man is limited to the word *greatness*. The king and general provides all important and necessary elements to make man greater, but the pursuit of greatness is always placed in a higher position than the man himself. He examines man's potential but never his human feelings.

Aegisthus:

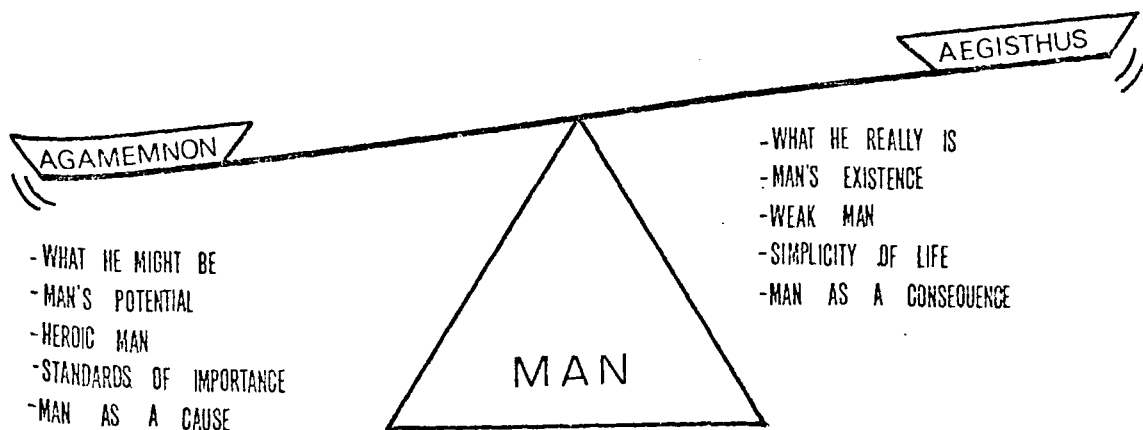
*...I will tell you that you have failed because of an indifference to the characteristics of your own species; that is, if you'll forgive a much-misused word - man.*

Agamemnon:

*My indifference? (...) My entire life has been involved in his problems. I've been half-way around the world correcting the injustices done to him. I've gathered the best philosophers together to decide on the government which would give him the greatest individual potential. I've set up courses of improvement that he might follow to a greater life. I've shown him the goals he thought unattainable, might be, with a little effort, reached. And by my own life I've proved them worth the greatest battles. Is this, then, indifference? (P 55)*

Agamemnon and Aegisthus are separated by irreconcilable principles which do not come to a position of equilibrium: one order will always take the place of the other in its appropriate time. This is the

reason for Aegisthus' resolve during his conversation with Clytemnestra before the king's arrival. (P 24) And, for the same reason, he fears Orestes' presence, the representative of *the next generation*, who will avenge Agamemnon's death and will be the continuer of his principles.



The following quotation sums up Agamemnon's and Aegisthus' different points of view of man:

Aegisthus:

*...there is a great difference between us. You love man for what he might be; I for what he is. You glory in his potential; (...) I sympathize with his existence as it is now and always will be. You cry for the heroic; I have tears for the weak. You give him marble principles to live by; I give him imagined reasons to live. You want him to create justice and control life; I teach him to accept the fortuitous and realish obedi-*

*ence. In short, you have seen man as a cause  
(...) but it is now time to look at him  
unadorned and naked. (P 54-5)*

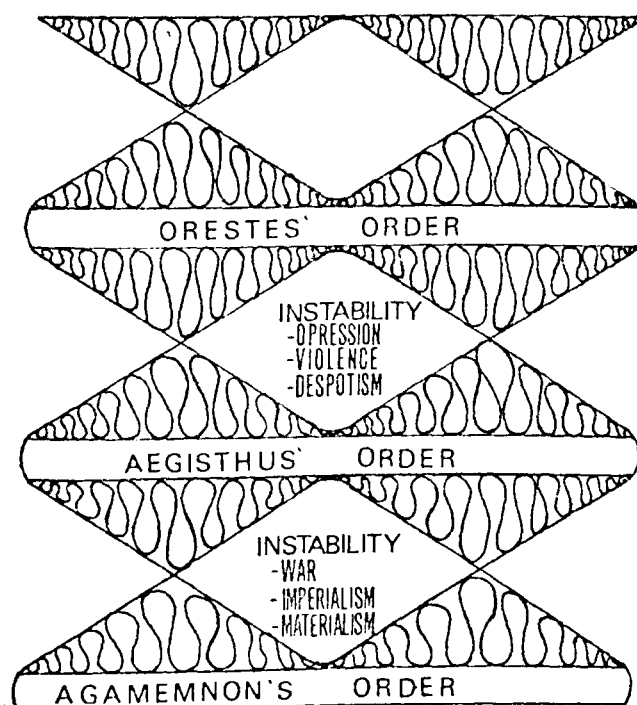
### 5.3. CONCLUDING ARGUMENTS

Jack Richardson uses the ancient legend of Orestes to dramatize his theory of Historical Evolution. Agamemnon and Aegisthus, who represent two complementary phases of history - the *conquering phase of humanity* and the *organizational stage of a ruler* - do not come to a position of equilibrium because two orders with opposing political systems cannot coexist.

The political ideologies of both rulers - the adoption of a policy which gives supremacy to the state or which promote the rights of man - can be easily identified with the philosophical doctrines of Machiavelli and Hobbes on the one hand, and Locke and Rousseau, on the other.

Clearly, Richardson believes in a humanitarian and democratic form of government where *...majority dictates the plot...* (P 112) and everything is defined according to their needs. Such political ideology completely avoids supremacy of the state over man and believes that a government should be deposed when it

is oppressive and tyrannical, unable to promote the well-being and happiness of the people. The Prodigal characterizes an attempt to arrive at an equilibrium between state and humanitarian forces: a balance which symbolizes the ideal form of government. As man seeks perfection and does not reach it, he passes through periods of stability and instability. In The Prodigal, the periods of stability are characterized by partial and temporary accomplishments. As the political orders are not perfect or definite, they will be exhausted after a period of time. The *old order* undergoes the reaction of new institutions, ideas and ideals which serve to create new political structures. This is the incessant and dynamic process which obeys the laws of action and reaction. In The Prodigal the following happens:



Agamemnon himself personifies a conflict between State and Man. He is a great king and general and his soldiers consider him a brave leader, but he sacrifices his soldiers' lives and even his own family to realize his idealistic dreams. He gazes *...with an impersonal eye at the world which he molded to suit his great ideals...* (P 45) Aegisthus points out the fact that Agamemnon does not have the power to understand his soldiers' feelings. The *cool reasons* of a general and a king have triumphed for a time. All should be well with the world but Agamemnon's order lacks the acceptance and contentment of his soldiers who are tired of living far away from their homes. The war weakened the soldiers and now they need a time of peace. (P 55) In this way, Agamemnon, upon his return, is not accepted either as a father, a husband, a king or a general because his system has been exhausted; the people now need a new, tranquil order to take the place of the previous one. (P 40)

Richardson emphasizes and confirms in The Prodigal, Thucydides' view regarding the formulation of a universal concept of the dynamics of History. The structures of a state are based on the existence of opposing ideologies which cause periods of tension and balance.

Historical Evolution sees ideological changes

in the political structures of a society from time to time. The political changes are generally a result of oppressive forms of government which provoke discontent among the people and lead them to chaos. Thucydides points out, concerning the conflict between force and right, that force is the central point of the origin of war and rebellions.<sup>7</sup> The American Independence is an example of a revolt caused by the oppression and firm control from the mother-country over the colonists. Within this same political background, Agamemnon's order in Richardson's play is exhausted after a long period of war, fights and tension. (P 27) Later on, Aegisthus' order requires a renewal phase for the same reasons as Agamemnon's - violence, oppression, discontent.

Richardson criticizes in The Prodigal, Agamemnon's order because of his imperialist policy, which brings forth political, psychological and social problems to Argive society. The social and family consequences upon the citizens are evident through Orestes' reactions. The prince, like many other children, does not know his father except through his legend; he grows up far away from his father's companionship and guidance because of the constant and long-lasting wars and fights. (P 40) Even his family suffers a lot. The same happens with all the other soldiers: they cannot

even recognize their own children when they come back from Troy.

Certainly the author is extending his criticism to all countries which throw themselves into fights in order to guarantee the ideals of the state but disregard the soldiers' lives, families and children.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> DEBUSSCHER, Gilbert. Modern Masks of Orestes: *The Flies* and *The Prodigal*. Modern Drama, 12:315, Dec. 1969.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.316.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p.312.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p.314.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p.315.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p.316.

<sup>7</sup> JAEGER, Werner. Paideia: a formação do homem grego. São Paulo, Herder, 1936. p.425.



## GENERAL CONCLUSION

Jack Richardson's choice of the Orestes legend as the focus of The Prodigal was very appropriate. He illustrates his theory of Historical Evolution with reference to Greek History and Mythology, Thucydides' testimony of the historical events of his age and modern philosophical and historical theories. The modern dramatist uses the myth of Orestes to dramatize his theory of Historical Evolution and to justify his point of view of man's subservience to the laws of society and history.

The Greek and Modern Civilizations are closely related in The Prodigal. Through his dramatization of the historical events which involved the war of Troy as narrated by Thucydides, Richardson demonstrates that similar postwar psychological effects also influence the modern age. In the aftermath of wars come revolutions, social reactions and political changes. In these situations we recognize that various political-philosophical principles such as the importance of a

leader, the participation of people in the decisions of government and the exhaustion of political systems, reflect not only the atmosphere of ancient times but also that of our own age. All these elements can be identified in The Prodigal.

The dilemma between the adoption of a humanitarian or an authoritarian form of government characterizes not only Greek Culture but the political-historical events of all ages - as in the American Revolution. The dialectics which involve man and state concern not only political rulers but are also of great importance to philosophers, historians and especially to artists. The latter are the voice of society and translate the people's anxieties, passions and conflicts into work of great value. This is the case of Jack Richardson in The Prodigal, which embodies the above-mentioned political arguments.

Many modern political theorists, such as A. Toynbee, analyse historical movement - the moments of stability and instability which accompany history. As such movements of balance and imbalance characterize the historical events which structure the play The Prodigal, Toynbee is an important point of reference and systematization in this dissertation. Toynbee himself emphasizes that he was inspired by the testimony of Thucydides in his attempt to formulate universal

laws.

Political systems have characteristics which are very different from those which are attributed to the Creator of the Universe. No state policy is perfect and eternal but merely temporary and limited to the accomplishments of men who seek perfection but do not attain it. For this reason, political systems are submitted to a continual renovation of their structures due to periods of stability and instability, action and reaction, tension and balance, challenge-and-response, which cause the disintegration of institutions and the emergence and growth of others. Civilizations throughout history have gone through similar stages of growth, decay and dissolution which lead men to the formulation of universal concepts.

Although Jack Richardson preserves the essential lines of the Orestes myth, he introduces new scenes, motivations and debates to illustrate his theory of Historical Evolution. The author's point of view is, above all, based on political principles which promote the well-being of the people rather than the State. Richardson believes in a humanitarian and democratic system where people satisfy their needs and anxieties. According to Richardson, the voice of the people should carry great weight in the decisions of governments. He is completely against war, which is an agent not only

of political and historical instability but also of and family imbalance. The crucial political dilemma is to achieve a policy of State which fulfils men's needs, providing for their well-being, satisfaction and security. The ideal form of government is that which embodies the ideals of the state and the rights of men. But, as the structures of the state are based on the existence of essential oppositions, the balance between Man and State is not attained.

Therefore, in The Prodigal, Jack Richardson makes use of Greek Mythology and Greek History to approach two situations which are inserted in a parallel historical-political context. The political and sociological arguments which illustrate Richardson's theory of Historical Evolution are intended to appeal to men's social conscience. Through a better political and social awareness we can confront the problems which affect our society.

## RESUMO

Os dramaturgos gregos basearam as suas peças em fatos mitológicos e históricos que receberam uma interpretação trágica. Dentro deste contexto, Jack Richardson, que tem um profundo conhecimento da tragédia Grega, também tenta inserir alguns acontecimentos políticos e históricos que afetam a Civilização Moderna dentro da estrutura do mito de Orestes. Em sua peça, The Prodigal, que está sendo analisada nesta dissertação, ele enfoca a Guerra de Tróia e, como acontece em todas as guerras, os soldados que voltam, como os cidadãos de Argos, são atingidos pelas conseqüências psicológicas de após-guerra de exaustão e fadiga.

Na peça citada acima, a dimensão política é fundamental e constitui uma espécie de *leitmotiv* que sustenta a ação. O autor demonstra um interesse especial pela função política do homem - a estrutura política determina os aspectos sociais e religiosos nesta peça. Em um texto literário, o aspecto político não transporta valor por si só, mas, pode significar um

elemento essencial de sua estrutura.

Richardson dramatiza a sua teoria de Evolução Histórica em The Prodigal pondo em evidência as razões e circunstâncias que causam a queda de uma Instituição, que não pode manter os seus valores fundamentais contra uma nova mentalidade que emerge. Ele analisa as divergências políticas, a sociologia da família e discute argumentos religiosos, literários e filosóficos, tendo como modelos os personagens da antiga mitologia.

O principal objetivo desta dissertação é determinar a teoria de Evolução Histórica de Jack Richardson em The Prodigal. A minha intenção é comparar a peça moderna com a Oréstia de Ésquilo para determinar até que ponto os dois dramaturgos sustentam os mesmos pontos de vista e quais especificamente são as inovações introduzidas por Jack Richardson.

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## APPENDIX

### CHARACTERS NOT DISCUSSED IN THE TEXT

#### Clytemnestra

*Clytemnestra is the most powerful figure in the Oresteia, one of the most powerful, indeed, in all dramatic literature.* (OT 13) Aeschylus' Clytemnestra is universally known because she plotted with her lover to murder her husband. Clytemnestra is the only character who appears in all three plays. Aeschylus gives a significant part to Clytemnestra in the drama because of the social position of woman in Athenian society at that time. On the other hand, Richardson plays down Clytemnestra's role in The Prodigal. She is a woman dominated by fear, *I still fear his return* (P 27), *I am trembling, Aegisthus* (P 31). She does not share any of the characteristics of Aeschylus' Clytemnestra who is cynical, false and whose words are full of double meaning. ...*Justice herself shall lead him*

to a home he never hoped to see (OT 73). In Aeschylus, Clytemnestra is an instrument of the predestinated murder. In Richardson, she does not plot the murder of her husband but, on the contrary, she tries to intercede with Aegisthus to make him give up the idea. However, Aegisthus makes Clytemnestra take part in the murder because he has decided that

*Death will be a bond between them. (P 90)*

*You can't do this Aegisthus. You can't. (P 88)*

*You will mark me forever if you strike, Aegisthus. (P 89)*

*Neither would stop. I tried, but Aegisthus' sword cut past me. (P 93)*

### Pylades

According to the mythology, Orestes was sent to Phocis by Electra when he was still a little child. The prince was brought up close to his cousin Pylades who was son of the king Strophius. The legendary friendship which linked Orestes and Pylades from childhood became universally famous. Pylades helped his friend to punish the murderers of Agamemnon. In Richardson's play, the author preserves the legendary friendship between Orestes and Pylades in the three first acts at least, *Pylades views mirror my own. For that reason, I love him as much as I do myself (P 16)*. But, in the last scene, Orestes and Pylades have an

argument because Pylades does not agree with Orestes' position of non-involvement. Orestes refutes his friend's ideas and they decide to separate although they are linked by the same crime. Pylades:

*...I am no moral person, but would I stand by and see my father murdered? ...I have no wish to be left out in the world with your mark upon me - Pylades and Orestes, Orestes and Pylades - these names hang together, bound by your crime. ...I remain nothing but the friend of Orestes. (P 98-9)*

#### Penelope

She is a governess in Agamemnon's household and is Electra's nurse in The Prodigal. She is in her middle fifties; strong in appearance, voice and manner. Penelope dislikes and discredits Orestes totally from the beginning to the end of the play.

*He waits for nothing but the chance to make poor jokes at the expense of better men. (P 6)*

*Don't listen to him, Electra. He will not help me, realize what he is. (P 92)*

#### Praxithia

Praxithia, in Richardson's play, is a fisherman's daughter and symbolizes Orestes' change of finding peace at last. She and her father went to the temple to ask the priests' blessings of the marriage according to the custom in Athens. But, the priests refused to give this blessing because Orestes, her fiancé, has not avenged his father's murder.